

INTRODUCTION TO RECOLLECTIONS OF THE OPERATIONS UNDERTAKEN BY A SQUADRON OF THE 13th/18th ROYAL HUSSARS (QMO) DURING THE 1944-45 CAMPAIGN IN EUROPE

From D-Day of the invasion of Europe on 6th June 1944 until my Regiment the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (QMO) was entering the outskirts of BREMEN on about the 25th April 1945, I was the Squadron Commander of A Squadron of the Regiment. I was then posted to command the 25th Dragoons in India.

I had served continuously in A Squadron since I was commissioned into the Regiment in 1936.

During the Campaign in Europe my Squadron Clerk (Lance Corporal Neville Blythen), who travelled in the B Echelon of the Regiment, which consisted of lorries carrying stores such as clothing, rations and NOT ammunition and petrol (which was the load of the A Echelon) would visit my Squadron HQ every third and fourth day with the delivery of COMPO rations and letters for the tank crews.

During these visits I would dictate to him an account of the activities of the Squadron during the previous few days. When he returned to the location of the Echelon he typed my reports in diary form on a D-Day plus basis.

The diary was lost for many years, but eventually was returned to me from the "effects" of a soldier who was the Squadron Clerk at sometime "post war".

The diary commenced on D-1 and relates, in outline, my experiences and observations during the campaign. In the future I hope to be able to obtain contributions from members of my Squadron who served with me during the campaign so that a comprehensive account can be recorded.

On D-Day the Squadron was equipped with Sherman Amphibious (Swimming) tanks. The Regiment was one of the three Armoured Regiments of the 27th Armoured Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Eroll Prior-Palmer (father of Lucinda Green, of more recent equestrian fame).

The Brigade was under command of 3rd British Infantry Division which landed on Sword Beach on the left of the Allied Assault on D-Day. The Regiment was in support of 8th Infantry Brigade which assaulted with 1st Battalion South Lancashire Regiment on the right, supported by A Squadron, and 2nd Battalion of the East Yorkshire Regiment on the left, supported by B Squadron. C Squadron was supporting 1st Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment who were to pass through the positions of the Assault Battalions to capture the German Concrete Defensive positions south of Colville-sur-Orne.

The initial task of the Amphibious Squadrons was to neutralise the Beach Defences, after swimming ashore from 7000 yards, prior to the arrival of the Assault Engineers mounted in a variety of specialised (flails and demolition) tanks, who were to create tracks through the minefields for the movement of vehicles from the beach.

Once the exits were opened we were to move off the beach to support the Infantry to capture their inland objectives, which in the case of the South Lancashires was the village of HERMANVILLE. D-Day should have been on the 5 June 1944, but the bad weather forecast caused postponement by 24 hours. During this period the assault troops remained incarcerated in their landing crafts and ships, in our case LCT's and Mk IV, in the Solent. Each LCT Mk IV carried five Sherman tanks in "Well Deck Holds". Four LCT's carried each Assault Squadron. The Flotilla was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Charles Creighton RNVR. We had trained together in the Moray Firth, from Fort George, during the Spring of 1944, in some very bad weather conditions. From the tank crews point of view the crafts were extremely unpleasant since the tank and their crews were confined to the well-decks from which they could only see the sky. When the tank diesel engines were running the exhaust fumes circulated within the well-decks producing an unhealthy atmosphere which, when added to the wallowing motion of the crafts in rough seas, produced a sickness tendency amongst the tank crews. They were known as "ALTMARKS".

(The ALMARK was an infamous German ship in which allied seamen were imprisoned under appalling conditions. It was eventually captured in Norwegian waters and the prisoners released.)

The Record of Events
(The Diary Entries are in "Brackets")

THE ASSAULT LANDINGS
with
3rd BRITISH INFANTRY DIVISION

D – 1 (5 June) "We sailed from the Solent at about 2 pm in a rough sea. The majority of the tank crews were seasick. Commanders opened the sealed packages containing the operational orders and studied them and the accompanying maps and panoramic photographs of the shoreline.

The night was uneventful except for the unpleasant weather and conditions on the Landing Craft. I think that all of us looked forward to being on dry land, wherever it might be. Before dawn I went to the bridge of my Landing Craft and asked Charles (Creighton) how we were getting on. His reply was 'You and I, Derrick, seem to be the only people carrying out this invasion'. However, soon afterwards the other craft of his Flotilla appeared astride us and the invasion fleet emerged astern."

D-Day (6 June) "At 06.16 all tanks were launched, after closing to 5000 yards (from the planned launching distance of 7000 yards). The sea looked alarming from the craft but FLOATER (launch) proved to be the right decision. Only Corporal Sweetapple's tank failed to swim towards the shore. This was because he could not get his propellers to fall and to engage with the drive off the tracks. His tank sank but he and his crew were picked up from their inflatable dinghy. Naval and Air Bombardment was tremendous and occasional glimpses of the shore were possible, due to the offshore wind which carried the smoke of the bombardment towards us. The tanks were performing well beyond what we thought to be practicable for the apparatus. Four columns each of five tanks (less Cpl Sweetapples) followed the lead of a Landing Craft Personnel (Navigational) the task of which was to lead us to the correct point of 'TOUCH DOWN' on the beach. Our tanks touched down at 07.23. Sixteen tanks got their tracks on the sea bed, moved into water sufficiently shallow to allow them to deflate their screens and to engage the beach defences."

I still remember very clearly the 'brewing-up' of the leading AVRE Churchill tank as it drove down the ramp of an LCT which was beached a few yards to my left front. The turret and the contents thereof spun into the air after a violent explosion, presumably caused by a penetrating direct hit by an anti-tank shell which detonated the explosive charges which the AVRE was carrying for the purpose of destroying concrete replacements.

I immediately got my gunner to engage a bunker from which I thought that the shot had been fired. His first round hit the target and the gun became silent. We then continued to fire at suspected defensive positions until we could see nor hear any firing from the defences.

The Assault Engineers crossed the beach and started to carry out their task of creating 'exits' from the beach. The Assault Companies of the South Lancshires came ashore, crossed the beach with very few, if any, casualties and passed inland.

We had, therefore, successfully completed our first task, which was to neutralise the beach defences.

We could now only wait for the Engineers to open the 'exits' so that we could escape from the beach to support the Infantry in the capture of their inshore objective – the village of HERMANVILLE.

As no 'exit open' signs (windsocks on poles) had been erected I decided to dismount from my tank and to walk along the beach to our right to inspect a road which I could see led straight onto the beach. When I got there I was surprised to see that the German anti-tank mines, which should have been placed in prepared holes in the road surface, were stacked up on the side of the road. I hurried back to my tank and remounted. By then the beach area was becoming a distinctly unhealthy place, due to mortar and shell fire. The time must have been about H + 15. The

'windsocks' had still not been erected so I ordered my Squadron to follow me from the beach via the exit that I had found.

At that time I did not know that so many tanks had been 'swamped'. Shortly afterwards the Battalion HQ and Support Companies of the South Lancashires came ashore and, I believe, suffered quite severe casualties; including their CO (a distant cousin of mine) who was killed.

Having left the beach we caught up with the Assault Companies, who were not meeting much opposition in the village of HERMANVILLE.

When we reached the southern edge of the village we took up defensive positions in the orchards.

As a matter of interest the timings for the Assault Landings were as follows:-

H – 5	DD tanks open fire	07.25 hrs
H Hour	Assault Engineers land	07.30 hrs
H + 7	Two Assault Companies land	07.37 hrs
H + 20	Battalion HQ and Reserve Companies land	07.50 hrs
H + 45	Regimental HQ and 'C' Squadron land	08.15 hrs
H + 60	SP Artillery land	08.30 hrs

The Regimental War Diary records that "RHQ and C Squadron landed at H + 45 on White Beach (ours) to find that the beaches were still uncleared and considerable shelling and mortar fire encountered. Eventually by 09.00 hrs the tanks were able to pass through (presumably the official 'wind-socked') the exits". It would seem that my exit may not have been noticed or used by any of the assault troops.

The country in front of us, to the South, was open farmland gently rising to the ridge north of CAEN. To our left front was the German defensive bunker areas known as MORRIS and HILLMAN the capture of which was the prerogative of the SUFFOLKS, supported by C Squadron. We were cautious not to expose ourselves to this area.

My own 'official' account and that of Captain Denny, as recorded on 9th June were as follows:-

L.C.T 101 – Major Wormald, OC A Squadron

I was with the flotilla officer of 14 L.C.T Flotilla and received orders to 'FLOATER' at H – 110 mins. Orders were later received to close to 6,000 yards and then to 5,000 yards, when 'FLAG ZERO' was given. The DD Drill was a complete success.

From our launching position, we could see that we were approximately opposite the church in LION SUR MER and that our beach was about 45 degrees to our port bow. No bombing had started on the beach and the houses were clearly visible. The starboard navigational leader took station ahead and the launch was complete in about 4 mins. We went down the ramp in first gear because of the heavy seas and all craft set off somewhat extended but keeping good station. No fire was opened by the enemy during the swim in or until we touched down at about 300 yards from high water mark.

At approximately H – 30 mins the AVRE Flotilla was seen to be bearing down on our port quarter and passed us. All craft (tanks) managed to avoid being run down. Shortly after this, when fire from the L.Cs.T.R began falling short, the AVRE and LCT Flotilla came astern and we were able to pass them. After this the beach became obscured by bombing, Artillery concentrations, and the fire of the L.Cs.T.R, about 10 per cent of which fell short.

In touching down, the AVRE L.C.s.T passed us for the second time and the leading AVRE were wading ashore before our DDs had moved in to deflate. Various explosive charges went off around us whilst we were moving from touch down position to deflating position. The screen of

one tank was holed by one of these charges and the tank became swamped. Another of my tanks was swamped by what we thought was a wave soon after touching down (but it may also have been a charge). The crew had to bail out.

The leading AVRE was hit by an anti-tank gun as it emerged on to the beach. On the beach the 88 mm and 75 cm emplacements were quickly recognised and dealt with, as were all pill boxes and machine gun posts. The two assault infantry companies were able to cross the beach, without being fired on by small arms.

6. The AVRE and flail operations were not highly successful on WHITE beach, but a gap* was eventually found and we were able to pass straight through on to the second lateral.

*My exit – see page 3
AVRE – Assault Vehicle Royal Engineers

L.C.T 103, Captain Denny, 2nd Captain A Squadron

Wireless communications for the launching drill worked well and my craft load launched at about 4,500 yards. The second tank had some mechanical trouble, but otherwise everything went according to plan. The sea was rough and the tank stood up to it far beyond my expectations.

At about 1,500 yards from the beach the AVRE LCT passed between the port and starboard columns. Shortly afterwards, they stopped their engines and then went astern, and we passed them again. The rockets then began their concentrations, and were falling short amongst us. The Squadron kept good station, in spite of these intrusions.

Enemy fire began at about 700 yards from the beach and the crews got inside their turrets. Up to 1,000 yards I could pick out the required landmarks and check that we were steering in the right direction.

At about 800 yards I was rammed by an LCT and we sank immediately, the tank going over on its beam and sinking for about 25 ft ending upside down. Although the crew were wearing ATEA and 'Mae Wests' they never appeared again, as I did not see them during the 30 mins I was in the water. The rest of my column beached satisfactorily but three of them got swamped by the incoming tide and only one got through the gap on to the shore.

Besides myself, the survivors (by tank commander's names) were Captain Lyon* (my 2I/C), Lieutenant Hunter*, Sgts Hepper* and Morris (who had been my tank driver in 1940 from the R Dial in Belgium, to Dunkirk – affectionately known as "Faather").

*Later killed in action

During a peaceful period I discussed with the surviving Crew Commanders the possible fate of the remainder of the Squadron. Our conclusions were as follows:-

<u>Tanks</u>	Cpl Sweetapple	-	sunk on launching	- crew picked up
	Capt Denny	-	sunk by LCT	
	Sgt Marke	-	run down by LCT	
	Cpl Gammon	-	run down by LCT	
	Lieutenant Garlick	-	caught foot in collapsing strut	
	One tank	-	hit underwater mine (on pole)	
	9 tanks	-	swamped by incoming tide after engaging beach defences. (Swamped because waves broke over the tear screen and filled the tank – stopping the engine.)	

Personnel – A very dubious assessment

Missing	-	believed drowned	5
Missing	-	?	5
Missing	-	Returned to the UK	10
Wounded	-		4

Another account of the DD Assault is told by Lance Corporal Patrick Hennessey, who was then commanding a DD tank and is now Group Captain Hennessey OBE RAF (Retd).

“We were roused long before dawn on the morning of 6th June. The sea was still rough and there was a strong wind blowing. We heard and watched the airborne force pass over us, hosts of gliders following their tugs, preceded by the aircraft carrying the parachutists and the busy fighter escorts above them. As daylight slowly appeared we could see ships of every description stretching away to the horizon on both sides of us and to the rear. It was a stupendous sight which must remain in the memory of all who saw it. We marvelled that such a gigantic force could assemble over a period of five days and move across the English Channel, undetected.

At last the order came to board the tanks. We climbed, on stowed away bedding rolls and made sure that everything was in its place, and we took post to inflate the screen.

The air bottle was turned on and the screen began to rise. We took particular care, this time, to make sure that the struts were secure because we could feel the effect those large waves having on the LCT, and we were under no illusions as to what they would do to a puny DD tank once we got into the water.

The bombardment started with a tremendous roar of gunfire. On our left we heard a terrifying ‘whooshing’ noise and saw a veritable firework display as the rocket firing ship (LCR) went into action. The burning projectiles carved an arc through the sky as they sped towards the shore. Beyond her stood HMS Warspite, adding a loud contribution from her large guns. We had been warned that it would be very noisy, but this still took us by surprise.

We heard the order over the ships tannoy, “Down door No 1”, and we knew this was our cue. The ramp on the bow of our LCT was lowered into the sea, the ship hove to, tank engines started, and Sergeant Rattle’s tank moved forward down the ramp and nosed into the waves. We followed, and as we righted in the water I could just see the shoreline some 5000 yards away; it seemed a very long distance and in a DD tank, in that sea, it certainly was!

Slowly, we began to make headway. The crew were all on deck apart from Harry Bone who was crouched in the driving compartment, intent on keeping the engine running because, as we all knew, if that stopped we stood no chance of survival. The noise seemed to increase and the sea appeared even rougher from this low point of view, with only a flimsy canvas screen between us and the waves. We shipped a certain amount of water over the top of the screen from time to time, so Trooper Joe Gallagher, the co-driver, whose task it was to man the bilge pump, was kept hard at work.

We battled on towards the shore through the rough sea. We were buffeted about unmercifully, plunging into the troughs of the waves and somehow wallowing up again to the crests. The noise continued and by now the shells and rockets were passing over our heads, also, we were aware that we were under fire from the shore. The Germans had woken up to the fact that they were under attack and had brought their own guns into action. It was a struggle to keep the tank on course, but gradually the shoreline became more distinct and before long we could see the line of houses which were our targets. Sea sickness was now forgotten. It took over an hour of hard work to reach the beach and it was a miracle that most of us did. As we approached, we felt the tracks meet the shelving sand of the shore, and slowly we began to rise out of the water. We took post to deflate the screen, one man standing to each strut. When the base of the screen was clear

of the water, the struts were broken, the air released and the screen collapsed. We leapt into the tank and were ready for action.

"75, HE, Action – Traverse right, steady, on. 300 – white fronted house – first floor window, centre".

"On"

"Fire!"

Within a minute of dropping our screen we had fired our first shot in anger. There was a puff of smoke and brick dust from the house we had aimed at, and we continued to engage our targets. Other DD tanks were coming in on both sides of us and by now we were under enemy fire from several positions which we identified and to which we replied with 75 mm and Browning machine gun fire."

Harry Bone's voice came over the intercom:

"Lets move up the beach a bit – I'm getting bloody wet down here!" We had landed on a fast incoming tide, so the longer we stood still the deeper the water became. As we had dropped our screen, the sea was beginning to come in over the top of the driver's hatch and by now he was sitting in a pool of water. The problem was that the promised mine clearance had not yet taken place, so we had to decide whether to press on through a known minefield, or wait until a path had been cleared and marked.

Suddenly, the problem was solved for us. One particularly large wave broke over the stern of the tank and swamped the engine which spluttered to a halt. Now, with power gone, we could not move, even if we wanted to. Harry Bone and Joe Gallagher emerged from the driving compartment, soaking wet and swearing.

Infantry were coming ashore, their small landing craft driving past us and up to the edge of the beach. There was quite a heavy fire fight in progress so we kept our guns going for as long as possible, but the water in the tank was getting deeper and we were becoming flooded. At last, we had to give up. We took out the Browning machine guns and several cases of .3 inch belted ammunition, inflated the rubber dinghy and, using the map boards as paddles, began to make our way to the beach. We had not gone far when a burst of machine gun fire hit us. Gallagher received a bullet in the ankle, the dinghy collapsed and turned over, and we were all tumbled into the sea, losing our guns and ammunition. The water was quite deep and flecked with bullets all around us. We caught hold of Gallagher, who must have been in some pain from his wound, because he was swearing like a trooper, and we set out to swim and splash our way to the beach. About half way there, I grabbed hold of an iron stake which was jutting out of the water to stop for a minute to take a breather. Glancing up I saw the menacing flat shape of a Teller mine attached to it; I rapidly swam on and urged the others to do so to.

Somehow, we managed to drag Gallagher and ourselves ashore. We got clear of the water and collapsed onto the sand, soaking wet, cold and shivering. A DD tank drove up and stopped beside us with Sergeant Hepper grinning at us out of the turret. "Can't stop!" he said, and threw us a tin can. It was a self-heating tin of soup, out of the emergency rations with which we had been issued. One pulled a ring on top of the tin, and miraculously it started to heat itself up. We were very grateful for this, and as we lay there on the sand, in the middle of the battle taking turns to swig down the hot soup, we were approached by an irate Captain of Royal Engineers who said to me: "Get up Corporal – that is no way to win the Second Front!"

He was absolutely right, of course. Rather shamefacedly we got up, moved further up the beach and found some medical orderlies into whose care we delivered Joe Gallagher who cheered up considerably when someone told him he would be returning to Blightly as a wounded 'D Day Hero'. We left him at the Field Dressing Station and moved on. We had only our pistols with us, but we found a discarded Sten gun and some magazines. Attaching ourselves to a section of the South

Lancashires, we made our way inland. The beach, by now, was a very unhealthy place to be, it was under intensive small arms and mortar fire, mines were exploding and being detonated by our own mine clearance services, and all the time the build up of troops and vehicles continued, making it a very crowded area. Clearly, we were not of much use to the Infantry in our unarmed state, so I found the royal Navy Beach Master and reported our presence to him. He was a very busy man at the time, and advised me to: "Get off my bloody beach!" We made our way to the road which ran parallel to the sea, some four or five hundred yards inland, and there we met up with some other unhorsed tank crews.

I could not help feeling a bit unwanted at that stage. There was plenty of action taking place, but there was not a lot that we could do to influence the course of the battle and nobody seemed keen to invite us to join in. Of course, we had already played our part, and we could look back with some satisfaction. We had done what most people had thought was impossible, we had swum a 32 ton tank through 5000 yards of savagely rough sea and had given that vital support to the Infantry to enable them now to have the chance to do their job of clearing the beach. On reflection, I had learned a valuable lesson from the events of that morning. Sgt Hepper, for instance, had clearly not been deterred by the prospect of mines on the beach and had driven his tank ashore, accepting the risk. If I had used initiative and done the same, our tank would not now be standing submerged some 150 yards out in the sea. The RE Captain too, had the right idea of 'Press on, regardless'. In the head of battle it really does not pay to sit back and weigh up the pros and cons of a situation, it is quick decision and immediate action which brings results. I mentioned these thoughts to Harry Bone, whose only comment was "Bugger that! – If we had hit a mine, I would have been sitting right on top of it."

D + 3 (9 June) "Squadron moved to BENOUVILLE area to rejoin the Regiment. Our role was to be prepared to counter any threat to the 6th Airborne Division, holding the Bridgehead over the bridges (PEGASUS). This was the first sight that most of us had had of the rest of the Regiment since the landing. All round us were the Gliders of the Air Landing Brigade, spread like giant crows over the fields. Much air activity was taking place. We were firing our turret mounted Browning machine guns at the enemy aircraft. Good for our morale but of little visible effect upon the enemy."

D + 4 (10 June) "Spent near BENOUVILLE. There was some shelling and mortaring during the day. Whilst we were taking tea beside our tank Trooper Surey, my tank gunner, was killed by a mortar fragment which hit him on the temple. I think that it was this incident which caused us to dig a pit under our tanks (about 18" to 2 feet deep) in which we were to live by day and sleep at night in comparative comfort and safety, particularly in respect of overhead cover, whenever we were located in an area within range of enemy mortar or Artillery fire. The pit slept four. Sergeant Charles Mason, my Squadron Signal Sergeant, opted to make his nest in the turret of the tank, where he remained, from Normandy to the Baltic, on 'Listening Watch.'"

"A Battalion of the Gordons of 51st Highland Division was now at BENOUVILLE just south of us. Another noisy night. During the evening we listened on our radio to B Squadron's attack, with Parachute Battalions, towards Le MESNIL, the object of which was to link up with 3rd Parachute Brigade, which had been cut off. This was east of the River Orne, in the Airborne Bridgehead. The attack was successful but B Squadron lost four Sherman tanks and the recce troop lost two Stuarts to anti-tank weapons concealed in the wooded country on the left flank of the attack."

It seemed to me that this was another case of an advance over open ground with an open flank, which might have been covered by smoke!

D + 5 (11 June) "We were moved into a defensive position along the ridge of BERIERS SUR LE DAN. To the south we could see the enemy positions around CAEN at COUVRE le CHEF and LEBISEY. CAEN itself was over the hill, except for its water towers and the double spires of one of its churches. To the north we overlooked the sea. We were 60 metres up and (off shore) we could see a tremendous concentration of shipping. HM Ships, including the HM Battleships RAMILLES and WARSPITE were bombarding, we thought, CAEN. To the west, as far as the eye could see,

were Barrage Balloons protecting the ships and beaches against the threat of low flying air attack. There seemed to be more equipment and stores coming ashore on the Canadian and 30 Corps beaches than our own (SWORD). A boom of sunken ships had been made off La BRECHE on our beach. All day the SP guns on our left and heavier guns further west have been shelling enemy positions. We watched some enemy guns move across our front about 3000 yards away. They do not reply very much by day. Twice enemy fighter bombers came in to attack the beaches but most of the time the RAF have complete domination of the sky. In the afternoon we were concentrated again ready to meet another threat to the airborne Bridgehead East of ORNE. 51st Highland Division have now moved into the Bridgehead and we are expecting to join them with a view to expanding the Bridgehead. A more peaceful night. We have been lucky with sleep, so far.”

BREVILLE

6th AIRBORNE DIVISION

D + 6 (12 June) “A lovely morning. At 13.10 hrs we were brought to one hours notice and at the same time ordered at 90 minutes notice to move immediately to east of the River ORNE. Moved at 14.10 hours with all troops complete. Met CO (Lieutenant Col Dick Harrap) as guide! Harboured at 108742 (west of RANVILLE).

(A little later) CO requested two Troop Leaders for a reconnaissance immediately (for an attack on BREVILLE tomorrow). Duty Troops 5th (Lieutenant Spencer) and 4th (Lieutenant Garlick), CO, myself and the two Troop Leaders went to recognise the area for the attack and to liaise with 12th Parachute Regiment, who were to carry out the attack. (I had it in mind that it would be better to involve the whole Squadron, if this were possible. I do not like penny packets.) After the reconnaissance the CO agreed that it would be better to involve the whole Squadron. He departed (presumably to visit 12 para RHQ) and left us to liaise with the troops on the ground and to finalise our plan for the attack. A Commando Company was holding the sector, commanded by a distinguished Commando Officer, Major Peter Young.

We visited him in his HQ, which was in the local Chateaux. He gave us a glass of brandy and explained the enemy layout and his own positions. We then left him and took a look at the enemy positions for ourselves, from the Chateaux’s garden. Whilst we were doing this, and at the same time consuming some delicious strawberries in the garden, we heard the unmistakable sound of Sherman tanks coming up the road from RANVILLE. Suspecting that they might be our own we abandoned our reconnaissance and ran back down the road and met our Squadron column.

Apparently the Commander of 6th Airborne Division, General Gale, had decided that the attack should be launched this evening. He is recorded in having described BREVILLE as being a dangerous gap in the perimeter (of the Bridgehead) east of the River ORNE.

Our CO had presumably received this information soon after he left us. He ordered my Squadron to move from RANVILLE and to meet him in Le PLEIN. (He could not get in touch with me because I was away from my vehicle on foot reconnaissance.)

He met the Squadron column in Le PLEIN at about 21.38 hrs and explained the plan to my Second in Command, in about two minutes. He then told them to ‘get moving’. Four Troops and Squadron HQ raced towards the orchard to the north of BREVILLE, from whence it had been decided that they could ‘soften up the defences’ prior to the attack. Firing was to begin at 21.45 hrs. It was during this process that I and my Troop Leaders met the Squadron column. I clambered onto the rear of the leading tank and directed the Troops to their firing positions. I then rejoined my own tank.

Miraculously all Troops were in position by 21.45 hrs and opened maximum fire onto the objective. This was to be for 15 minutes; 12th Paras would then launch their assault on the village.

One Troop, Lieutenant Garlick's (4th) were to move down the road from Le PLEIN to BREVILLE in direct support of about 160 men of 12th Para.

Their special task was to destroy a known strong point in the village, This they did. During this engagement Lieutenant Garlick's tank was hit by a 75 mm anti-tank shot which went straight through the mantlet and lodged in the turret of the tank. The wireless was shot away but there were no casualties in the tank.

At 22.00 hrs the fire support of the Squadron was to be switched to the wood to the east of BREVILLE until two red very lights were fired by the Paras. One Troop was then to move forward to give 'close support' to the Paras assaulting the wood. (During this action Sergeant Rodwell's tank engaged and destroyed an anti-tank gun.) The remainder of the Squadron, three Troops and Squadron HQ, were then to move to a position from which they could engage the wooded country to the north of BREVILLE.

We 'married-up' with the Paras on the 'start line'. Both parties knew their tasks but I never was able to liaise with any of their Officers. We had no time so to do.

The 'suppressive' fire power of the Squadron was initially superimposed upon that of the Divisional Artillery or vice versa.

The fire power of each tank in the Squadron consisted of two .300 Browning machine guns and a 75 mm gun. Initially this was thirty MGs and 15 75 mm guns, firing on BREVILLE. The 75 mm guns were firing HE 'impact fused' shells which produced 'airbursts' on the slightest contact with the trees in the hedges or on the edges of woods. Such 'airbursts' were lethal to enemy infantry in slit trenches, unless they had very substantial overhead cover and also to anti-tank gun crews in shallow gun emplacements. Therefore, the concentrated fire of the Squadron was sufficient to deter enemy resistance and could inflict severe casualties upon the defenders.

For example, at the time of the engagement of the target area to the north of BREVILLE we did not know that there were any enemy in the target area; but two days later when our troops occupied the area the 'pick up' of dead enemy was about 100. It was believed that they were forming up for a counter attack when we caught them 'in the open'.

On our 'start line' for the attack we had been subjected to quite heavy Artillery or mortar fire and I had seen a number of the Paras become casualties. At the time I thought that our own guns were firing 'short'; but it may have been enemy defensive fire.

I followed the attack into BREVILLE which itself came under heavy Artillery/mortar fire. It was getting dark. There was nothing that I could do so I withdrew from the village and rejoined my Squadron HQ, leaving 4th Troop with 12 Para.

Shortly after I had rejoined my Squadron HQ I received orders to disengage, with the exception of 4th Troop who were to remain with 12 Para, and return to the Regimental harbour area near RANVILLE. We rallied in Le PLEIN and had all reached the harbour area by 02.45 am. This was the first of the Squadron's major operations in support of Infantry since D-Day. The preliminaries for the attack in no way resembled those to be found in the 'text books' on the conduct of a planned attack and which we had rehearsed so often in the UK before D-Day. However, on this day we had 'married-up' with Infantry on the start line, provided them with the called for fire support and the 'objective' had been captured, together with five enemy anti-tank guns, intact.

The Squadron did not suffer any casualties to personnel; but I learned later that of the 160 Paras who had taken part in the attack 141 had become casualties. For them the attack was described as a 'brilliant sacrificial battle'.

The defenders of BREVILLE were the 3rd/878 Regiment whose strength, during the three days fighting in the area, was reduced from 546 to 146. It was therefore a bloody battle. Soon

afterwards our Intelligence sources reported that the Germans described it as 'a massacre at BREVILLE'. They avowed vengeance upon the tank unit which had perpetrated it!"

D + 7 (13 June) "4th Troop remain in BREVILLE. Sergeant Rattle (engaged and) destroyed a 75 mm SP anti-tank gun which approached their position. The Squadron remained in harbour near RANVILLE. I was summoned by General Gale, Commander of 6th Airborne Division, to carry out a reconnaissance with him for defensive positions for the Squadron in the event of an attack against his Bridgehead from the south, the area of St HONORINE and COUVREVILLE, by 21 Panzer Division which was located east of CAEN. During the reconnaissance there was continuous bombardment and counter bombardment overhead. General Gale approved my proposed layout (as his anti-tank advisor!). I suggested to him that the strength of the position would be considerably enhanced if some of the tanks could be 'dug-in'. He agreed and said that he would arrange for his Royal Engineers to be of assistance. Troop Leaders carried out recesses of their allocated positions."

D + 8 (14 June) "Tank crews begin to 'dig-in' their tanks. Quite a heavy task with only picks and shovels. Airborne REs not available."

D + 9 (15 June) "No change in the situation. Digging continues. The Squadron moved to a concealed location nearer to their defensive positions."

D + 10 (16 June) 'FLAP' "At 06.30 hrs the Squadron was ordered to occupy defensive positions and it remained in these positions all day, returning to our 'concealed' location at dusk. During the night the enemy had attacked and infiltrated into the area of the 1 GORDONS in the wooded country around ESCOVILLE. (We now appear to be under command of the 51st Highland Division.) The GOC 51 Highland Division personally ordered the Regiment to send one Troop to report to 1 GORDONS. At 10.00 hrs 4th Troop (Lieutenant Garlick) and Captain Denny, my Tech Captain, (to act as Liaison Officer at Battalion HQ) left the Squadron position and reported to 1 GORDONS at Le MESNIL. There they had a sharp engagement with elements of 21 Panzer Division.

The Squadron diary recorded that "at 14.00 hrs four tanks covering the advance of one Company of the GORDONS entered ESCOVILLE and advanced 2000 yards due west but did not get a shoot. They returned to Battalion HQ where the Brigade Commander of 153 Brigade informed Captain Denny that Lieutenant Col Harrap (our CO) had been killed. Apparently the CO had run into an enemy tank on his return to RHQ after reconnaissance with the Brigade Commander. The rest of the day, until dusk, was devoted to an unsuccessful attempt to dislodge six tanks which later developed into four Mk IV Specials plus three armoured cars and an SP gun, all manned by Poles serving in the German army. Corporal Charmbury shot up a 6pdr manned by Germans, missed a German traffic policeman and also missed one of the Mk IVs. During the day and the night both ourselves and the GORDONS were very heavily mortared and sniped. Captain Denny's and Lt Garlick's tanks were both hit by mortars. Trooper Robinson was injured in the shoulder (not seriously) and Trooper Denny in the left arm, necessitating his removal to the Field Ambulance. (The Battalion Group were cut off at times, which prevented the tanks from returning to the Squadron.) However, they did return at 10.00 hrs the next morning, via ESCOUVILLE which now changed hands twice but was, once again, in the hands of the GORDONS. It was learned later that 65 GORDONS were either killed or severely wounded during the sniping and mortaring of their positions.

One incident which occurred between the operations at BREVILLE and St HONORINE which I clearly recall was when I was carrying out a reconnaissance with our acting Commanding Officer, Major The Earl of Feversham. I was travelling with him, his driver and his operator in his jeep along a road in open country. It was a lovely day. I noticed that four Typhoons were circling overhead and was surprised when one of them turned into a dive at us. Before we could do anything about it the pilot had fired his rockets at us and the other aircraft were turning to follow up his attack. We halted rather quickly and bailed out. There being no convenient ditch along the side of the road the only 'inadequate' cover that I could see was the crater of one of the first

rockets to hit the ground. This was a hot spot – but better than nothing – so I dived into it. When the aircraft had completed their mission we arose from our prone positions, remounted our vehicle and discontinued our reconnaissance. The lesson that I learned from this incident was that rocket attacks against vehicles by aircraft, whilst being frightening, were not necessarily effective.”

D + 11 (17 June) “Uneventful, in that there was no activity on either side. Captain Lyon (2I/C) left the Squadron to take over command of B Squadron in succession to Major Rugge Price who became 2I/C of the Regiment. Captain Gale arrived to become second Captain of the Squadron. 14.30 – Funeral of Lieutenant Colonel Harrap.”

D + 12 (18 June) “Remain in ‘waiting’ positions for enemy counter attack. Intermittent shelling of our locations including attack by ‘Moaning Minnies’ (multiple projectiles fired from mobile vehicles). One casualty. Trooper Murley was killed by a shell fragment. He had only joined the Squadron two days previously.”

D + 13 (19 June) “Still in concealed positions. Weather very bad. I attended a conference at HQ 152 Brigade at 14.00 hrs. Subject – the capture of St HONORINE. I stressed the need for flank protection and movement with fire. I carried out a reconnaissance of LONGEUVAL in connection with the proposed attack on St HONORINE. Spasmodic shelling continues. Trooper Curtis slightly wounded. I was somewhat lucky in that a ‘spent’ fragment of a Moaning Minnie rocket hit me on the head when I was in my tank with my head out of the turret. Only superficial damage which was attended to by the RMO.”

St HONORINE 51st Highland Division

D + 14 (20 June) “No change. I attended a further conference at HQ 152 Brigade concerning the St HONORINE attack. The Brigade Commander stated that his night patrols into the village had reported that they had not found any enemy. He therefore intended to occupy the village silently tomorrow night. He required the Squadron to move into the village as soon as it was light enough so to do and to take up defensive positions. The ‘silent’ occupation was to be made by the 5th Battalion of the CAMERONS.

My appreciation of the situation, in relation to our defensive role, was as follows:-

The village was most vulnerable to a counter attack by Infantry and tanks from the area of COLUMBELLES, a suburb of CAEN about a mile to the SW of the village and separated from the village by a ridge; so that we could not see COLUMBELLES. The crest of the ridge was about 600 yards from the orchards on the edge of St HONORINE. The alternative for the enemy was to attack across the open country to the SE of the village, from the direction of COUVREVILLE, with armour. Of the two alternatives I considered the former to be the greatest danger and difficult to halt and destroy. I therefore selected the following layout for the Squadron.

One Troop in LONGEUVAL (2nd Troop – Lieutenant Hunter) which could fire onto the flank of any enemy approaching from COLUMBELLES.

One Troop in each of the orchards to the SW and west of the village, facing COLUMBELLES.

Squadron HQ and the reserve troop to be located in defensive positions in the centre of the village ready to deal with any enemy penetration through the perimeter defences and also to move to the orchard in the SE corner of the village, which was to be occupied by one troop (5th Troop – Lieutenant Spencer) to deal with any (unwise) attack by the enemy across the open country from COUVREVILLE. To my way of thinking, this open country (which the British army described as good tank country), was better anti-tank country.”

D + 15 (21 June) “Information that the occupation of St HONORINE is to be postponed for 24 hours. At 22.00 hrs 2nd Troop left the Squadron area and moved ‘silently’ at human walking pace, so as

not to make any noise which would immediately attract enemy Artillery/mortar fire, onto LONGEUVAL. In position by 23.30 hrs.”

D + 16 (22 June) “Weather greatly improved. Shelling had continued throughout the night. Great air activity (ours) this evening. Bombs were seen to be falling on CAEN. A pall of smoke could be seen in that direction. Enemy opposition not effective. Squadron HQ and four Troops move at 22.30 hrs to an Assembly Area from which to move into St HONORINE at first light tomorrow morning.”

D + 17 (23 June) “At 03.00 hrs the 5th CAMERONS started to make their silent occupation of St HONORINE. This was apparently soon met by, what was reported to be, heavy small arms, machine gun and mortar fire. At about 03.30 I was sent for by the Commander of 152 Brigade. He instructed me to give immediate support to the CAMERONS who he led me to believe were in St HONORINE but meeting some opposition. I pointed out to him that there would be little that we could do, since it was still dark, and we would not be able to know the position of our own troops or those of the enemy. However, I agreed to move into the village as soon as possible. I returned to the Squadron and ordered them to move off immediately. We moved in column, without lights, through a cleared lane in our own defensive minefield, that had been laid along the ridge between us and the village, and entered the village. Prior to the operation we had studied air photographs of the village so that all Troop Leaders and their Crew Commanders knew approximately the positions which they were to occupy in the village. They therefore dispersed accordingly, hoping to marry-up with the Companies of the CAMERONS who were supposed to be already there. However, this was not the case. There appeared to be only one Company, which was to have occupied the SW orchard, in any strength still in the village. For example, there were only one section of men in the SE orchard.

During our move into the village I do not recall being engaged by any enemy; but this was not too surprising because it was still not light enough for them to see our approach and there was some confused fighting in the village. As dawn broke it was noticed that some of the chaps who were occupying the slit trenches beside the tanks were wearing the wrong shaped helmets. With a little encouragement they soon left and we remained in occupation of our positions.

On the approach march two tanks had become immobilised. Captain Denny’s tank had strayed slightly from the axis and had become stuck in a sunken road, from which position he has extracted by a Bulldozer which I had somehow acquired and which was following the column into the village to create dug-in positions for our tanks in the orchards surrounding the village. Sergeant Rattle’s tank also strayed slightly into one of our own anti-tank mines, and was recovered later.

From the Squadron’s point of view the ‘occupation’ had been completely successful and without any casualties. As in the case of BREVILLE, the procedure was not to be found in a tactile textbook and the results was a great surprise – to both sides!

At 05.30 four enemy tanks were observed in the area of COUVREVILLE and were engaged by the 17pdr tank of 1st Troop from the SW orchard. Shortly after this an officer of B Squadron, Captain Wardlaw, who was in an observation position up a tree, reported that he could see between 35 and 40 enemy tanks moving from the area of COUVREVILLE towards St HONORINE. I went to the area of 5th Troop in the SE orchard so that I could observe the situation for myself; with a view to the deployment of Squadron HQ and my reserve Troop. I saw that the enemy were moving past St HONORINE and that they were being heavily engaged by 5th Troop. I halted in a slightly sunken lane, in front (from the enemy’s point of view) of a farmhouse and ‘hull-down’ to the enemy by the standing corn between us. I gave the appropriate orders for my gunner to engage the nearest enemy tank. My gunner was one Trooper (Hank) Cheal who had replaced Trooper Surey when he was killed. At the time I was not aware of the fact that he had had no training as a tank gunner. This was a distinct disadvantage to me since the enemy had spotted my tank and were firing at us. Fortunately they missed us and hit the farmhouse behind us. This produced a fall of masonry and a cloud of dust which masked our mutual visibility for short periods of time. In spite of these

interruptions 'my man' managed to fire off all our armoured piercing ammunition, without, from my observation, registering a hit upon the enemy. Again, fortunately, their standard of gunnery was as bad as ours in that they did not hit us either.

The opposition had halted. Besides the hail of fire coming from our direction they were now also being engaged by B Squadron on their right flank and by our medium Artillery. They decided to withdraw. About this time Lieutenant Spencer, commanding 5th Troop, appeared beside my tank and asked me whether he could borrow any AP ammunition. The answer was obviously negative.

My 2I/C also has a story to tell concerning this engagement. As soon as possible after this engagement Trooper Cheal became the co-driver of our tank. In this position he was in charge of our 'Cooker Portable No 2' with which he always provided us with excellent meals from COMPO packs and local produce and where he was to be, therefore, a useful member of our crew.

Another very much longer term consequence of this experience was that when, soon after the war, as a Staff Officer in the Branch of the War Office which was responsible for the writing of the General Staff Operational (User) Requirements for future tank design, I was able to obtain approval for the following:

"That the Commander of a tank must be able to lay and fire the gun (main armament) himself." This requirement was successfully developed by the Fighting Research and Development Establishment at Chobham and was incorporated in the production of Centurion and Chieftain tanks.

Before D-Day I had had a 'lining-up' device fitted to our Sherman tanks which enabled the Tank Commander to know when the Gunner was aiming his gun reasonably accurately at a point in a hedge or in the edge of a wood. This facilitated the rapid engagement of a concealed target, such as a tank or anti-tank gun, with HE or smoke shells.

I suppose that it was at midday that I considered that the threat from the direction of COUREVILLE was over for, at least, the time being. I therefore went to inspect the positions of the Troops of the Squadron (excluding 5th Troop with which I was very familiar). The first Troop which I visited was in the west orchard. The key area for defence against an attack from COLUMBELLES. In this orchard the 'key' tank position was in the SW corner. This was rather a smelly and messy area in that on the precise spot which I required for the tank were a number of very dead German soldiers and two dead British Paratroopers, who had presumably been killed on D-Day. Therefore, to the driver of my 'tame' Bulldozer, who had arrived in the village, I allocated as his first priority task the burial of the dead bodies and the creating of a 'dug-in' position for a tank on this site. He later helped the Crews of several tanks to 'dig-in' their tanks, particularly in the 5th Troop's area. When this was done the tanks had good all round protection and only presented their turrets as a target to enemy tanks. This was very necessary in any 'suicide' position, where withdrawal was not acceptable or practical, such as in St HONORINE.

The Regimental War Diary for the 23 June reads as follows:

05.30 hrs Enemy tanks, including Mk IVs, began to appear on the right flank moving towards St HONORINE, and within a short time 1st Troop of A Squadron reported engaging four of them. In all about 30-40 tanks appeared to be approaching the village and owing to the uncertainty of our Infantry support it was necessary to engage them at maximum range.

07.15 hrs Enemy Infantry (part of 125 Panzer Grenadiers) appeared to be putting in an attack from the Cuverville direction but quick Artillery support laid on by the FOOs from the Div Arty with our forward Squadrons soon dispersed this. One tank was hit at closer range, its crew bailed out with a white flag, and advanced to surrender, but there being no Infantry readily available to accept this gesture and take them in charge, they changed their minds and went back, later towing the tank with them.

08.00 hrs Our pre-arranged DF tasks were laid on, and appeared to score considerable success. Tac R reported another 30-40 enemy tanks moving along the Troan/Caen road and swinging northwards but some of these we saw being successfully engaged by the tank – busting Typhoons.

All this time the wooded area of St HONORINE had not been properly cleared, and snipers and mortars continued to be active.

09.00 hrs OPs reported enemy tanks and Infantry continuing to concentrate in the Cuverville area preparatory to an attack on our right flanks, and smoking off the right hand tp of A Squadron in the area south of LONGUEVAL.

09.40 hrs Enemy shelling from the factory area spotted by our OP from C Squadron, coming from the factory at COLUMBELLES. Counter battery fire laid on.

10.00 hrs 2nd Troop C Squadron reported engaging with enemy soft vehicles by fire successfully. Shortly afterwards one enemy tank was destroyed by them.

10.30 hrs 4TH Troop C Squadron brought up on the left flank east of Escoville to join 2nd Troop in position of observation.

11.00 hrs A considerable enemy movement of tanks and SPs reported during the last hour or so appears to be for the purpose of making us disclose our positions, which fortunately we have anticipated. The chances are that the Boshe still thinks that we are anti-tank guns.

11.25 hrs A Squadron report 3 enemy tanks knocked out.

11.50 hrs Definite signs of enemy withdrawal towards Cuverville, and we are now able to support our Infantry forward, to mop up the village and the surrounding woods.

12.00 hrs Total bag so far:-

A Squadron	10 tanks
B Squadron	1 tank and 1½ track
C Squadron	2 tanks and 1½ track and a certain amount of soft vehicles.

13.10 hrs B Squadron reported enemy aircraft flying over with British markings. Report confirmed from other sources.

13.30 hrs A Squadron reported their area clear of the enemy.

15.30 hrs Heavy Artillery concentration laid down on enemy in area and reported successful. 3 ORs and 3rd Troop C Squadron dismounted and were wounded by mortar fire.

16.00 hrs Owing to the lull in the fighting it was possible to begin replenishment of POL and ammunition.

17.15 hrs A Squadron report that the enemy is forming up again on the right flank and laying smoke. Dealt with by Artillery.

St HONORINE was not really a village but a hamlet consisting of farmhouses with three orchards to the west; SW and SE of the buildings. In the centre of the orchard complex was a large pasture upon which there were scattered a number of dead, bloated and smelly cattle (a feature of the Normandy countryside at that time).

During the day 'missing' elements of the CAMERONS rejoined their Battalion from behind their start line; but their strength was not sufficient to defend the whole area against a night attack by the enemy. By now I considered that the Squadron could hold the area by day. The Infantry,

therefore, concentrated their efforts on the night time defence of the west and southern perimeter of the area and it was decided that they could not spare any sub-unit for the defence of the SE orchard. Therefore, this orchard was to be abandoned at night.

At dusk the whole Squadron withdrew from their defensive positions to harbour in the central pasture area. The move took place at walking pace, so as not to irritate the enemy into 'stonking' us.

We formed up into a rectangle with roughly two troops on each side and Sqn HQ at one end. All tanks facing outwards with their guns loaded with HE and pointing at the ground about 50 yds away. Some Browning MG were on ground mountings in the sleeping pits under the tanks. Quite a formidable fortress and a formation which we had often practiced in the UK. However, no enemy approached us at night to test its effectiveness.

During the night the CAMERONS were relieved by the 5th Battalion of the SEAFORTHES. Brigadier Murray was, I believe, relieved by the Divisional GSO I, Lieutenant Col Jim Cassels. Later to become Chief of the General Staff.

Every day until the 28th June, the Squadron moved into their defensive positions at first light and returned to harbour at dusk (silently). From the 28th until the 4th July, the 'armoured' garrison was reduced to three troops whilst the remainder of the Squadron joined the Regimental area near RANVILLE.

On 26th Lieutenant Garlick and Trooper Bryant were wounded by shrapnel whilst camouflaging their tank. On the 27th Lieutenant Hunter was wounded by shrapnel and Trooper Hollands was killed in LONGUEVAL. On this day, three of the missing crews from D-Day (Sergeant Marke, Corporals Gammon and Sweetapple) rejoined the Squadron from the UK.

D + 29 (4th July) "The whole Regiment moved from the Bridgehead area and the 51st Highland Division to LUC SUR MERE, a small coastal village about 5 miles west of HERMANVILLE, to rest. A Squadron was relieved in St HONORINE and LONGUEVAL by 148 Regiment RAC. We left the Bridgehead area at 00.15 hrs on 5th July."

D + 30 (5th July) – 7th July "Our movement to LUC SUR MERE had been by a tank track which was very dusty and on the 5th we, firstly, tried to clean ourselves. We had been living in or under our tanks since 22nd June with ablutions restricted to a canvas bucket of cold water at times when one hoped that the enemy would not suddenly deliver an Artillery or mortar 'stonk'. Our second priority was to undertake a 'spring-clean' of the interior of the tanks. This entailed un-stowing all the ammunition etc. This task we started to undertake on the morning of the 6th; but by midday we were told that our holiday was to end next day when we would be required to support operations by 59th Midland Division in a series of attacks towards CAEN via LA BIJUDE, EPRON and AUBERGE."

LA BIJUDE and EPRON
59TH Midland Division

"The Regiment was to support 176 Infantry Brigade. B Squadron was to support 6th Battalion of the N Staffordshire Regiment in the capture of LA BIJUDE. C Squadron was to support 7th Battalion of the Norfolk Regiment in the capture of EPRON and A Squadron, with 7th Battalion of the S Staffordshire Regiment in Brigade Reserve with the probable task of capturing COUVRE CHEF, after the successful outcome of the other two attacks.

Another Brigade of the Division was to be operating on our right, with the East Riding Yeomanry."

For the 7th July the Regimental history records that Bomber Command of the RAF dropped 2,350 tons of explosives in just under 40 minutes on the hinge of the German line at CAEN ...

The effect of the attack on the morale of the enemy was shattering, although casualties were comparatively light. It was the first time that aircraft of Bomber Command were to prepare the way for offensive action by the Army.

The Regiment moved to a concentration area north of CAZELLE at 23.00 hrs on the 7th.

8th July The Squadron Diary states that "Arrived in the concentration area at about 01.00hrs. Leagured in this area. Moved to (forming-up) positions with our Battalion at dawn.

Attack by B Squadron was to have taken place at 04.00 hrs and that of C Squadron 1½ hours later. 6th N Staffs with B Squadron did not capture their objectives (LA BIJUDE and entrenchments to the west of the village) – which was anticipated by lower command (presumably me!). However C Squadron attack was put in, contrary to expectations (presumably by me – because their attack was to pass to the east of the objective of B Squadron which had not been captured and was across forward sloping open country with also an exposed left flank), but was reported by 13.00 hrs to be successful. The report stated that three sub-units of C Squadron and three sub-units Platoons of NORFOLKS were in position at the southern end of the village. This proved to be totally inaccurate and throughout the battle it was found that the Infantry lacked any communication with their Brigade HQ (from which my Battalion Commander was receiving his information) and were relying entirely on reports given by the supporting Squadrons. Furthermore, the Infantry Battalion Commanders could not be found at their HQs. This caused considerable delays."

"At about 18.00 hrs I was ordered to send one troop (5th) to escort the 7th S Staffs (our Battalion) into EPRON where there was reported to be considerable sniping. They were to RV at the CHATEAUX do le LONDE. Move due to take place at 20.00 hrs. The Squadron Leader and Lieutenant Spencer (5th Troop) visited the Battalion HQ of the NORFOLKS at the Chateaux where it was discovered that a 'composite' company (all that could be mustered at that time) would also be moving into EPRON with us. It also transpired that no information had been received from the company of the Battalion which had been reported to have been in the village since 09.00 hrs that morning. It was, therefore, considered (by me) to be advisable to take some precautions and to carry out a reconnaissance for the intended advance." We (Lieutenant Spencer and I) went to La BIJUDE.

"On arrival in La BIJUDE (only the village part of the objective had been captured by the 6th N Staffs and B Squadron) which was to be the start line for the advance of the composite company of the NORFOLKS and, apparently, now only one company of the 7th S Staffs, it was found that C Squadron were not even in the northern edge of EPRON."

"This matter was hastily reported to our CO and then to the Brigade Commander both of whom were firmly of the opinion that their respective formations had been in EPRON since 09.00 hrs that morning."

"A considerable stir took place at this juncture. Both Commanders coming to the scene in tanks. At about this time it was learned that the remainder of the 7th S Staffs (less the Company with us), supported by B Squadron, were to capture the (remainder of) the La BIJUDE objective of the 6th N Staffs which they had failed to do in the morning.

This objective consisted of considerable dug-in positions west of the village."

"At the appointed time, 19.45 hrs, the (two) Companies (which were to occupy EPRON) appeared, supported by 5th Troop. However, the Squadron Leader halted the troops on the start line, since the situation was very different from that which had been explained to him when the (silent) reinforcement of the NORFOLKS in the village had been the task for the force." There was no supporting fire of any kind laid on for the move (attack).

The Squadron Leader told the Brigadier of his action and asked for some support to be provided. This was hastily arranged by the employment of C Squadron, in addition to 5th Troop, providing 'suppressive' fire on EPRON, prior to the advance of the Infantry companies. After a suitable amount of such treatment on the objective the Companies were 'waived' on and told that it was alright. This they believed and by 22.00 hrs they had captured the village and taken 15 prisoners for the loss of one casualty."

"5th Troop then passed through EPRON and carried out an independent reconnaissance as far as the anti-tank ditch some distance beyond the objective (unintentional) and returned to Squadron harbour about midnight. No orders had been received from RHQ. Squadron went to bed!"

I believe that, at dusk, the Squadron 'rallied' and harboured south of EPRON. I recall that on the road entering EPRON it was quite difficult to avoid driving over dead German bodies. I also recall that Sergeant Rattle, who had been on an independent walking reconnaissance, came to me when I was settling down for the night under my tank (feeling very ill) and reported that on a road not far away to the SW he had seen some 40 British and Canadian soldiers dead and unarmed. He presumed that they were POWs who had been murdered by the Germans.

9TH July "At 03.00 hrs a message was received from RHQ ordering two troops to fill gaps against armoured attack at La BIJUDE and Ch de la LONDE. Troops were to be in position by 05.30 hrs.

"3rd and 4th Troops moved out at 04.30 hrs to take up their positions."

"No more news was received until 07.30 hrs when Squadron Leaders conference was ordered for 07.45 hrs. At this conference the plan for the day was outlined. This was that the entrenchments to the west of EPRON, which had not been attacked the previous evening by 7th S Staffs, should be taken by the 6th N Staffs. The attack to begin at 10.00 hrs and that there would be a further plan to capture COUVRE CHEF after the entrenchments had been taken. Support for the 6th N Staffs would be given by B Squadron. Whilst A Squadron would cover B Squadron (left open flank). B Squadron were to move at Infantry pace at the rear of the Infantry who were to move at 100 per minute behind a creeping barrage laid down by five Field Regiments. The conference ended at 08.45 hrs.

(My) Appreciation was that there was little time to get into position.

"(Squadron) Orders were given out at 09.10 hrs. 1st, 2nd and 3rd Troops were to give immediate support by continuous (suppressive) fire on the COUVRE CHEF, throughout the day! Squadron Leader went in a jeep to BIJUDE to select positions. 3rd Troop, which was to lay smoke to cover the left flank of B Squadron was in position by 10.00 hrs. The Regimental Commander then arrived and informed the Squadron Leader that H/Hour had been postponed until 10.30 hrs. Gunners were apparently unaware of this fact and began their barrage at 10.00 hrs. Shells falling on our own Infantry in occupation of the eastern end of the entrenchments. They seemed to be unaware of the start line about 500 yards west of EPRON."

"By 10.30 hrs Squadron HQ and 1st, 2nd and 3rd Troops were in position and prepared to engage the village of COUVRE CHEF. However, it was impossible to obtain information from anywhere as to whether the village was held by our own Troops, therefore, they could not open fire. Smoke was therefore laid to obscure the village from the attack."

"By 11.30 hrs we were informed that the battle was likely to last longer than allowed for in the timed programme. More smoke had to be obtained. This was achieved."

At about 13.30 hours the objective was captured.

"Nothing further happened until about 15.00 hrs when the Squadron was ordered to send one troop about two miles south to observe the main road to CAEN from the west and to watch for enemy withdrawals. There was no information as to the position of our own troops or the enemy in this

area and there seemed to be some danger of this task being undertaken by a single troop. The Commanding Officer arrived in the village and it was decided to send two troops under the command of Captain Gale, supported by three sections of carriers (a Battalion's carrier platoon)."

"At about 15.30 hrs Captain Gale with 3rd and 4th Troops and the Carrier Platoon moved off to carry out this task. Arriving in their appointed position at about 16.00 hrs without incident or at seeing anything to report. The remainder of the Squadron were then ordered to occupy COUVRE CHEF in which there was thought to be a Company of the S Staffs. This was completed by 16.30 hrs when contact was made with the Infantry Company. At about 17.30 hrs a Battalion of 197 Brigade and the East Riding Yeomanry arrived in the village of La FOLIE, about ¾ mile to the west of our position. At about 20.00 hrs a message was received to return to harbour. This was complied with and we arrived back at CAZELLE at about 23.00 hrs."

During the two days with 59 Division there had been a considerable degree of confusion. It seemed to me that the operation went wrong when the attack was launched by the NORFOLKS, before La BIJUDE was captured, with an open left flank and insufficient protection on this flank and over open ground. They suffered severe casualties and by the evening could only muster a composite company, with which we eventually entered EPRON. In my opinion the flank should have been covered by Artillery smoke, as we did the next day for the attack on the entrenchments by 6th S Staffs and B Squadron.

During the operations the Squadron had not suffered any casualties.

(9 – 16 July) "Regiment at CAZELLE for rest period. Baths, entertainment and other means of diversion provided. Opportunity also taken to carry out admin tasks, eg kit inspection and replenishments."

GOODWOOD 3rd British Infantry Division

(16 July) "Left Chateau at CAZELLE at 17.15 hrs and moved to field by air strip. Very dusty and very hot. A journey of about two miles only. We were to sit in that location until 01.30 hrs when we were to move east of R ORNE to relieve Airborne Div. This was only the cover plan to a large scale attack by 1st and 8th Corps to break out south and east of CAEN and on to FALAISE. Divisions to take part were 3rd Br Inf Div, 51 H Div, 3 Can Div, 7th 11th and Guards Armd Divs.

The part to be played by 3rd British Division in the big 'breakout' attack was important but somewhat insignificant. The Division was to attack the enemy forward defences and to secure the left flank of the 'breakout' whilst the 51st Highland Division was to do the same thing on the right flank, thus enabling the three Armoured Divisions to pass through the corridor thus created. The order of passing through the corridor was to be the 11th, Guards and finally the 7th. After the 11th had captured the enemy's forward positions in some depth the Guards were to capture the BOUGREBUS and then the 7th were to pass through to capture the FALAISE area, some 20 miles to the south of our existing front line. None of these objectives were achieved mainly because, apparently, the enemy had anticipated (based upon their intelligence sources) the attack and had deployed 21st Panzer, 12th SS Panzer, 1st SS Panzer and part of 2nd Panzer Divisions in defensive positions 'in depth' (in good anti-tank country) 36 hours before the attack.

The attack was to be preceded by massive air attack by RAF Bomber Command and the USAAF on suspected targets in the path of the attack.

The Regiment was to be in support of 8th Infantry Brigade of 3rd British Infantry Division.

8th Infantry Brigades objectives were PRE BARON (S LANCS supported by A Squadron), TOUFREVILLE (E YORKS supported by B Squadron) and SANNERVILLE (SUFFOLKS supported by C Squadron).

The Squadron was again in support 1 S LANCS whom we had not seen since D + 1. This Battalion had had many changes. The CO (Col Birbury) had been killed on D-Day assault. The 2nd I/C (Major Stone) had since been wounded and evacuated. The Battalion was now commanded by Lieutenant Col Bowster(?). There were only three of the original Officers left and about 30 men per Company. It was a very different party from that which we had trained with at FORT GEORGE and planned with at GOSPORT.

A reconnaissance of the harbour area was made by Capt Denny whilst Lieutenant Denney carried out a reconnaissance of the route. As darkness fell, a thick mist descended on the Bridgehead and visibility was reduced to about 10 yards.

(17 July) The Regiment formed up with some difficulty and moved to the east of the R ORNE under cover of darkness. Order of March – A, RHQ, B, C. We moved off at 01.40 hrs and the drive was very unpleasant and uneventful. The River ORNE was crossed by 03.30 hrs an hours delay being caused owing to the bridge being temporarily out of commission. Our harbour area was at HEROUVOLLETTE and was eventually reached at 06.45 hrs (three hours late). We immediately camouflaged as well as possible and dug our living quarters (this in spite of a very dead cow).

The Squadron now consisted of 4 Troops each having three 75 mm tanks and one 17pdr tank and Squadron HQ three 75 mms tanks. Sergeant Bell (1st Troop) with his tank crew was away on guard duties at General Montgomery's HQ. Sergeant Marke was left out of battle in order that 2nd Lieutenant Watt could have some battle experience. Troop Commanders were Lieutenants Denney, Elliott, Jennison and Spencer.

Immediately after arriving in this new area, Squadron Leader and Captain Lyon went to make contact with CO of S LANCS with whom an RV at 5 SEAFORTHS HQ had been arranged for 05.30 hrs. It was still very misty and visibility was not more than about 100 yards. It was, therefore, impossible to see the ground for the battle.

For several reasons, liaison with S LANCS was extremely difficult and the plan which they had made was not suitable for armour co-operation. Fortunately, Brigade Commander, 8th Infantry Brigade forbade the use of certain troops in the way the CO of S LANCS wished to use them. The plan was, from our point of view, very fluid and it was agreed that we could only support the attack by fire from the right flank.

The S LANCS objective was a very wooded piece of ground which we had once held and which Captain Denny had visited with 4th Troop on about D + 10. This objective linked up with the triangle to the east. The day was fully taken up with conferences, recces and preparation. It was not until after 19.00 hrs that the extent of the battle beyond 8 Infantry Brigade level was allowed to be publicly divulged. Conferences eventually finished at 23.00 hrs and all retired beneath or inside our tanks.

D – 42 (18 July) Reveille at 05.30 hrs and all ready to move at 06.30 hrs. H hour was to be at 09.00 hrs. At 06.00 hrs RAF Bomber Force arrived and for one hour HE bombs were dropped on the objectives off the Suffolks, E Yorks and the Armoured Divisions. Squadron moved out at 07.15 hrs to a forward assembly area on the west side of the PRE BARON farm. From 07.30 hrs to 08.00 hrs USAAF dropped splinter bombs on the forward enemy positions. At 08.00 hrs a local barrage opened on PRE BARON, rather close to our positions in ESCOVILLE where we were formed up ready to move through the minefield which surrounded the village. The barrage was to be on the start line for 10 mins then to move forward at 100 yards every 5 mins. At 08.10 hrs the Squadron began to move through the minefield lane. Order – 4th, 2nd HQ, 1st, 3rd. Owing to the smoke caused by bombing, visibility was restricted to about 30 yards. Troops were soon through the minefield and deployed on to BUTTE DE LA HOGUE facing east with 4th Troop covering our rear. B Squadron were advancing on the right flank to deal with certain entrenchments known to exist on the west end of the BUTTE DE LA HOGUE feature.

After about 30 mins D Company started to pass through our positions and we gave strong supporting fire cover. Captain Denny was acting as Squadron Liaison Officer with Battalion HQ and was located 400 yards north of BRE BARON farm. Two Companies of Infantry were to have moved through the wooded country to reach their objective on the south edge of a very enclosed piece of ground 1000 yards from the start line. No information was received from their leading Companies for two hours in spite of repeated requests for information from the CO of 1 S LANCS. Eventually 2nd Troop was sent ferreting into the orchards and found a few 'feet' who knew nothing. Cpl Charmbury who was commanding 2B was wounded in the head and had to retire from the operation.

Squadron Leader went over to 2nd Troops location to try and make contact with Infantry. Only the odd man was found and all reported being held up by Spandau fire and mortaring. Very little could be done because the Infantry did not know the position of their forward platoons. Eventually a Company Commander appeared and a small plot was hatched to cover them into the wood from the south east. For this action, 3rd Troop was also brought into the wood to suppress the enemy positions with Browning fire.

The Company were seen to advance in a southerly direction but we lost contact with them here. It transpired later that they had lost their way and had to establish themselves elsewhere. Squadron Leader then visited Battalion HQ and suggested another Company be used to get on to the original objective following the route of the lost element. This was agreed to and a zero was fixed. 2nd and 3rd Troops were to support by harassing fire into the wood. The Company was over 30 mins late in forming up. However, it eventually went into the wood and was given intimate support by 3rd Troop. This attack produced one prisoner and the situation was considered to be in hand. The capture of this prisoner was memorable to me in that whilst I was observing the progress of the operation (or lack of it) through my binoculars from the turret hatch of my tank, which was located on the edge of some scrub land and which was thought to have been cleared by the Infantry, I was tapped on my left shoulder and looking round was surprised/alarmd to see a German soldier. However, there was no need for alarm because he very politely asked (in English) whether it would be possible for him to be taken prisoner, as he was tired of the war. A suggestion with which I was pleased to agree. I was also pleased that he was a medical orderly and not a fanatic member of the Hitler Jugend with a grenade.

In the meantime, 1st Troop under sub-command of Capt Lyon had done good work with D Company and had destroyed at least four Spandau posts at very close range. One SP half track was 'brewed up' on the ESCOVILLE – TOUFFREVILLE road by 1st Troop.

About 70 prisoners were taken during the day by the Battalion.

The most interesting fact about this engagement was that although no enemy were seen by 2nd and 3rd Troops, their Browning fire was so unpleasant that when the last reserve Company attacked the position the enemy had been forced to withdraw and no shots were fired at this Company.

At about 15.00 hrs the Squadron was released from the Battalion and took up a counter attack position on the eastern end of the BUTE DE LA HOGUE with B Squadron on our right and eventually C Squadron in reserve. During the operations with the S LANCS mortaring and Nebelweffer (Moaning Minnie) attacks had been severe but we had not received any direct hits on our tanks. One interesting feature was that although our Intelligence reported that there were no enemy in the area, quite considerable opposition was encountered. Corporal Charmbury was our casualty.

B and C Squadrons encountered more opposition and suffered more casualties but captured their objectives.

19th July "The Regiment remained counter attack positions; but extended to the west to

St HONORINE. The heat of the previous day had given way to rain. It poured down, practically all day, and quickly filled with water our living quarters under our tanks in spite of frantic efforts to divert the flow elsewhere.”

Rumours were that we had lost 176 tanks yesterday, in the breakout. It seemed that the breakout had failed.

My thoughts at the time were as follows:-

During our stay in St HONORINE we had regularly observed the movement of small numbers of enemy tanks in the area of COUVERVILLE. It was not unreasonable to assume they were preparing defensive positions, which should have been dug-in for maximum effectiveness. In my opinion the only ways in which armour could advance across that ‘open good tank country but better anti-tank country’ were either under the cover of darkness or behind a smoke barrage, with smoke also on their flanks. It also seemed to me that insufficient effort had been allocated to neutralise the enemy’s forward defences. This was confirmed when we examined some 20 brewed-up Cromwell tanks which had been, from the holes in their armour, hit from three dug-in positions near COUVERVILLE, one of which contained a knocked out German Panther tank. A simple mixture of smoke and HE on these defensive positions would have much reduced their effectiveness.

20th – 25th July The Regiment remained on the BUTTE DE LA HOGUE, prepared to take up defensive positions to engage an enemy armoured counter attack.

20th July “Occasional shelling caused some casualties in B Squadron. Rain continued practically throughout the day. Rum issued. Counter attack ‘flap’ in the TOUFREVILLE area. However, this proved to be false.

21st July Weather improved. No progress being made by the Armoured Divisions. The attack seems finally to have lost momentum on the line, on the right, BOUGREBUS (about 6 miles south of St HONORINE – CAGNY and EMIEVILLE on the left (an advance of about 3 miles)). 8th Infantry Brigade still attacking TROARN without success.”

22nd July “Weather definitely improved. Enemy still shelling the ridge (BUTTE) at odd intervals, chiefly at meal times. Conference in the afternoon concerning the break up of 27th Armoured Brigade. This was not considered altogether popular as the Brigade had been in existence since the formation of the 1st Armoured Reconnaissance Brigade at GOSFIELD, near BRAINTREE in Essex, in 1940 and with slight changes had managed to survive through being a Brigade of 9th Armoured Division and 79 (Specialised) Armoured Division and finally becoming an Independent Armoured Brigade. It was revealed that it had been the intention of Higher Command to form all the Regiments of the Brigade into reinforcements. Had our casualties not been so low this would have happened. Now the Staffordshire Yeomanry were to return to the UK to be trained as an Amphibious Tank (DD) Regiment. The East Riding Yeomanry were to join 33 Armoured Brigade and the remainder of the Brigade, including ourselves, were to join 8th Armoured Brigade under command of our Brigadier (Eroll Prior-Palmer). The other Armoured Regiments were to be the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards and the Sherwood Rangers (Nottinghamshire) Yeomanry.

23 – 24 July “Nothing of importance to report.”

25th July “Orders were received in the afternoon to move the support 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade, to form a firm base for (another) large scale attack towards FALAISE, to be made by 1st and 3rd Canadian Divisions followed by a break through by 4th Canadian Armoured Division and the Guards Armoured Division. Move took place at rather short notice to the area of the village of Le MESNIL FREMENTILL, about one mile NW of CAGNY. The Squadron’s task was to be the holding of prepared positions in SOLIERS and FOUR, on the BOUGREBUS feature NE of the village of BOUGREBUS. The positions were reconnoitered by the Squadron Leader and his 2I/C at dusk, as it was considered unwise to do so in daylight. It was thought that the enemy armour

opposing the attack would be the 12 SS Panzer Division, 10 SS Panzer Division and 503 Heavy (Tiger) Tank Battalion, under command of 21 Panzer Division.

26th July "After 'stand-to' (as dawn broke), the Squadron remained at one hours notice to move to occupy the forward villages of SOLIERS and FOUR. During the day the Canadians captured the village of VERRIERS, about ½ mile west of the main road CAEN – FALAISE, 5 miles south of CAEN. They captured and lost the village of MAY SUR ORNE about 2 miles further to the west and they failed to capture TILLY La CHAMPAGNE, about one mile SW of BOUGREBUS and ½ mile to the east of the main road opposite VERRIERS. Thus the breakout axis for the Armoured Divisions had not been cleared and they were not launched. However, in the evening an armoured engagement, from hull down positions, took place in the area of VERRIERS and RAF Typhoons were in action. The Squadron was not called upon to move."

27th July "Due to be relieved by 148 Regiment RAC during the day. The Regiment was to move to a rest area at CULLY (about 10 miles west of CAEN and north of the CAEN/BAYEAUX road) for a period of at least eight days, in order to prepare to join 8th Armoured Brigade. Our front appears to be inactive except for heavy shelling and mortaring on both sides. The Regimental Sergeant Major's half track was hit but not the RSM!

Our move took place at 15.30 hrs, via BRIAR and CAT tank tracks to CULLY. Tracks very dusty. Arrived at the Dispersal Point at about 17.30 hrs. No guides to meet us. They arrived half an hour later and announced that the rest area had been changed to the area of COLUMBS about 2½ miles west of CULLY. Much trouble with petrol tanks on the march. No proper maintenance had been carried out since CAZELLE on 16th July."

28th July "Rest begins. 11.00 hrs our old surviving DD tanks were replaced by tanks from the Sherwood Rangers. The Squadron now had three petrol 75mms, four petrol 17 pdrs and the remainder diesel engined 75mms. All tanks were stripped down and ammunition un-stowed. About lunch time a Warning Order was issued to move to join 8th Armoured Brigade; but it was considered that the move would not take place immediately, so cleaning up continued. However, orders to move were issued at 18.00 hrs. Move to be at 20.00 hrs. This was just not possible, since no tanks had even any ammunition stowed. 27th Armoured Brigade were informed that the move would not be possible so it was postponed until 22.00 hrs. Re-stowing hastily carried out. We were to move to a crossroads near BELLE DEL EPINE. Order of march B, RHQ, C, A. Then we were told that the time of the move had again been postponed; but that we were to 'stand-by'. Finally we were told to cross the start line at 06.30 hrs next morning."

29th July "Start line was about one mile NE of COLUMBS. The journey was uneventful except that at about three quarters of the way to LA BUTTE the RV was changed. It seemed that we would be going into battle again fairly soon and that our planned 'rest' period had already ended. We halted in a cornfield and awaited new orders.

"Squadron Leader was ordered to proceed to the HQ of 56th Independent Infantry Brigade." This Brigade was under command of 50th Northumbrian Division.

AMAYE SUR SUELLES
(A village about 2½ miles west of VILLERS BOGAGE)
Stage 1 – THE LAUNAY FEATURE

56 Brigade were to take part in an attack which was intended to break through the enemy defences in order to conform to the advances being made by the US Armies to our west and who were now reported to be in RENNES. On the left of 56th Brigade was to be another Brigade of 50 Division, supported by C Squadron. 56 Brigade's objective was AMAYE SUR SEULLES, about 4 miles due SOUTH of their present position in the area of GRANVILLE, which lies about 5 miles NW of VILLERS BOGAGE.

The Brigade's operation was to be executed in three phases.

Phase 1 – The capture of St GERMAIN d'ECTOT and the high ground to its west, about one mile south of GRANVILLE.

Phase 2 – The capture of the ridge, a further mile to the south – the LAUNAY feature.

Phase 3 – The capture of the final objective, AMAYE SUR SEULLES, a further 2 miles to the south of the LAUNAY Feature.

The country was typical of the 'Bocage'; small fields, large hedges, some with deep ditches and some sunken tracks. Good country for the use of the German Panzerfaust hand held anti-tank hollow charge weapons which they had used to devastating effect against British tanks, particularly when our tanks were without close Infantry protection, sitting alone on an objective.

The Brigade were to attack with two Battalions 'up'.

"On the right the 2nd GLOUCESTERS supported by 4th Troop with Capt Denny at Battalion HQ and on the left the 2nd SOUTH WALES BORDERERS (SWB) supported by 3rd Troop with Capt Lyon and Battalion HQ. The remainder of the Squadron was in reserve, with Lieutenant Watt at Brigade HQ as Liaison Officer."

"At about 20.00 hrs the Squadron moved to (three separate) assembly area(s) for the operations next day. Some difficulty was experienced during this move due to the nature of the country; but after an amazing point-to-point run Squadron HQ and the reserve Troops established themselves in an orchard near GRANVILLE. Capt Denny later stated that he and 4th Troop harboured at a place approximately ½ mile beyond the Brigade start line."

30th July H Hour for the GLOUCESTER'S attack was to be at 06.30 hrs whilst that of the SB's was to be 07.30 hrs.

Each Battalion Commander had given the main road GRANVILLE – CAUMONT as their start line. They did not seem to anticipate the 'walk-over' advance that had been forecast by their superior Commanders, based upon intelligence reports.

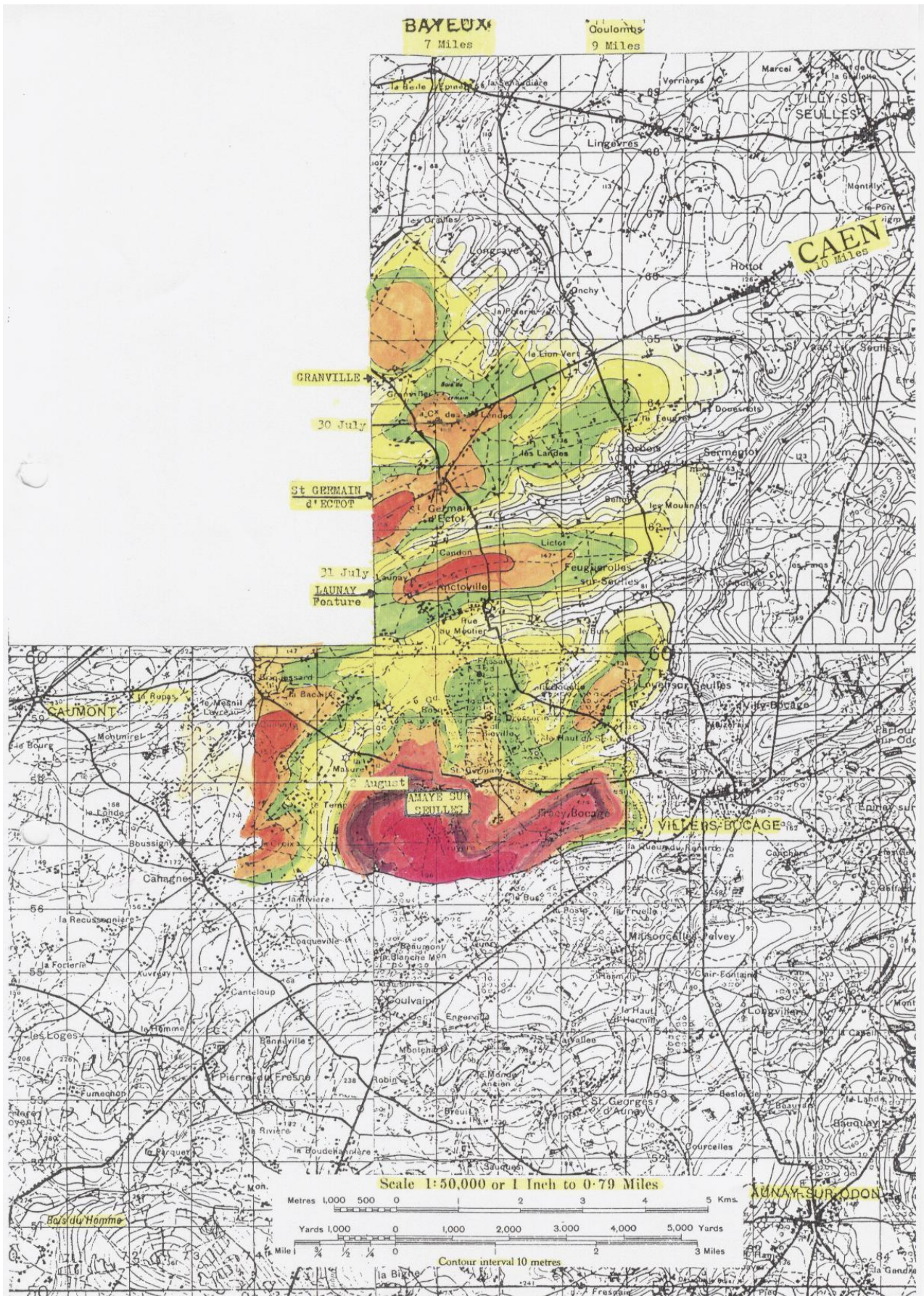
By midday the GLOUCESTERS, supported by 4th Troop had made good progress and had captured the high ground to the west of St GERMAIN d'ECTOT on the first of the Brigade's objectives, and had taken some 50 prisoners with about half a dozen Spandaus (MG's).

At about 14.30 hrs they were relieved by the 2nd Battalion of the ESSEX Regiment, whose first objective was part of the Brigade's second objective (the LAUNAY feature). They advanced about 50 yards and returned to the positions that had been held by the GLOUCESTERS saying that it was not possible to make any further advances. 2nd Troop were sent to this flank, to give additional support, under Capt Denny.

Later in the afternoon a further attempt was made, this time with Artillery support, to get the ESSEX forward; but this also was unsuccessful and the Battalion suffered quite a few casualties from enemy mortar fire.

At 20.00 hrs the ESSEX were relieved by the GLOUCESTERS.

At about 22.30 hrs 2nd and 4th Troops were withdrawn to harbour south of GRANVILLE and to replenish and re-arm.



During the afternoon the Troop Leader of 4th Troop (Lieutenant Spencer) and his Troop Sergeant (Sgt Holdsworth) had carried out a reconnaissance on foot with a Platoon Commander of the ESSEX, to try to find a way forward. On their way back to their tanks they saw a badly wounded German soldier in a hedge and they went to investigate the condition of this man. Whilst bending over the man Lieutenant Spencer was hit in the thigh by a Spandau which opened up upon them.

On the left flank progress during the day had been very slow. The Battalion did not cross the start line on time because they were waiting for the arrival of some Churchill Crocodile tanks (Flame Throwers) which were also to support them. These tanks had, in fact broken down and arrived some 3½ hours late. The attack was then launched under cover of 'suppressive' fire by 3rd Troop, who had passed through lanes in a minefield which had previously been cleared for them by Flail Tanks. However, the Infantry were reluctant to rush into the attack and by midday had advanced by about 400 yards (about 1/3 of the distance to their objective – St GERMAIN d'ECTOT) but they had captured about 40 prisoners and 5 or 6 MGs. Enemy mortaring was quite severe and had caused some casualties in the Battalion.

We suffered a tank casualty when Capt Lyon's tank ran over a mine on the edge of a road that was said to have been checked and 'cleared'. He then transferred to a RHQ AA tank, which was acting as a rear link from the Squadron to RHQ. Communication with him and his troops were therefore difficult during the day. Our tanks withdrew to Squadron HQ after dark.

My impression of the days operations was that the attacks had lacked Artillery support and that they had not been co-ordinated. My troops had been used in 'penny-packets' and the Squadron had not been able to exert much influence on the proceedings.

31st July A very misty morning.

The Brigade Commander had decided that his first task was to capture St GERMAIN d'ECTOT. This task was still to be carried out by the SWBs. H Hour was to be at 10.00 hrs. The attack was to have the armoured support of 1st Troop, a section (2) of Flails and a Troop of Crocodiles (Flame Throwers). The latter was much feared by the German Infantry. The mine clearance activities were to be covered by 1st Troop. When the lanes had been cleared the Crocodiles would then lead the Infantry forward. This time the attack was successful and the objective was captured.

"At 15.00 hrs the Brigade Commander informed the Squadron Leader that he intended to capture the LAUNAY Feature that evening. The 'Feature' was about a mile beyond our present front line. There was a formidable ditch between our positions and the Feature. The country on the left was extremely enclosed whilst on the right were fields and orchards. The Commander wished to attack on the left but it was pointed out to him that an attack on this flank would not permit the tanks to give maximum support. He, therefore, agreed that the attack should be on the right flank. He also said that the attack would be supported by 'his' Field Regiment of Artillery. This amount of support was considered by the Squadron Leader to be inadequate. He thought that at least the Divisional Artillery could be asked to be involved. He therefore spoke to his CO on the subject and as a result of this discussion the Gunner Representative from RHQ (Major Gosling of the ESSEX YEOMANRY) and the Commander RA from Division arrived at Brigade HQ.

A fire plan was agreed that would involve three Field Regiments and two medium Regiments RA.

The fire plan was that a 'barrage' should open at H Hour and move forward at 100 yards every five minutes down to the ditch where it would pause for ten minutes before proceeding up to the ridge and the village of LAUNAY at 100 yards every six minutes. Smoke was to be mixed with the HE and also to be fired on the right flank of the attack throughout the programme.

It was suspected that the enemy had laid mines south of St GERMAIN d'ECTOT (beyond our start line). It was, therefore, considered advisable to employ Flail tanks to create lanes, as a precaution, in the early stage of the advance. AVSRE were also available. These armoured sub-units came onto the Squadron radio frequency.

The ESSEX Regiment were to undertake the attack.

H Hour was originally set for 18.00 hrs. This was later delayed until 20.00 hrs, since all parties would not be ready by 18.00 hrs. The Battalion O Group was held at 19.00 hrs. The Battalion was to advance with two Companies 'up'.

The Squadron plan was to advance with all four Troops 'up' keeping as close to the barrage as possible and to engage any possible enemy positions as soon as the barrage had lifted from them.

The Squadron Leader was to be with the right half Squadron and Captain Denny with the left half Squadron. Captain Lyon was to be at Brigade HQ as Liaison Officer.

The barrage opened at 20.00 hrs rather closer to the start line than we had expected. As it moved forward the Flails started to operate. They were followed through their 'lanes' by the Squadron, who then opened their 'suppressive' fire on all possible enemy positions. I recall reprimanding the Tank Commander on my right for not producing enough MG fire. He had a 'stoppage'.

The leading Companies followed the tanks.

On reaching the ditch there was a pause; but the obstacle was negotiated and the advance was continued. A sunken road then held up the tanks as they approached the village (on the right flank) but the Infantry were close to the village and entered it without opposition as dusk fell."

The Squadron did not withdraw (which was customary) at dusk to a safe harbour area but rallied by troops who became responsible for their own local protection. This was considered, by the Squadron Leader, to be acceptable, because the Infantry were in occupation of the village in front of them.

The Squadron had not suffered any casualties during this operation. The ESSEX suffered two dead and three wounded. Of the dead one was killed close to my tank and I remember one of his comrades, after inspecting him, sticking his rifle into the ground on its bayonet and placing the dead man's steel helmet upon it – at the time I thought that this was an odd thing to do in the middle of the battle. The Squadron Leader leagured with 2nd Troop. During the night his crew 'stood-to' when the person on watch heard a creaking noise approaching the Troop. The main armament was on low depression, manned and ready to fire. Out of the darkness appeared the Troop Sergeant (Charlie Rattle – who had been the assistant Squadron Clerk as an unpaid Lance Corporal in 1936 or 37) wheeling a barrel of what turned out to be "Eau de Vie de Mar' (local brandy) on a farm barrow of which the wheel was in need of lubrication. This piece of 'loot' presented Sergeant Rattle's crew with a stowage problem, which they overcame for so long as it was necessary!

1 August "It had been planned that the Squadron should move to counter attack defensive positions on the LAUNAY Feature at first light. However, this was not practical since visibility was down to a few yards. The Squadron remained in support of the ESSEX, behind the Feature, until about midday when the Brigade Commander ordered it into Brigade reserve. The SWB had, by then, moved forward and established themselves on the left of the ESSEX and had made contact with a Battalion of the Brigade on our left. The Squadron rallied in the evening just south of GRANVILLE. At 21.00 hrs a Dispatch Rider arrived from Regimental HQ with a message to say that there would be a Squadron Leaders conference at 08.00 hrs the next day." (Signifying the end of our support to 56 Brigade.)

AMAYE SUR SEULLES
Stage 2 – 69 Infantry Brigade
50 Northumbrian Division

2ND August "Quiet morning – for the Squadron."

The Squadron Leader went to RHQ for the O Group at 08.00 hrs. On arrival there he was told that the O Group party was to move to the HQ of 69 Infantry Brigade. The route took them past the location of the Squadron at GRANVILLE. He had made an unnecessary journey of some 15 miles! The party arrived at the Brigade HQ, which was about 5 miles west of AMAYE, at about 09.00 hrs. Here they were told that the Brigadier was out on a reconnaissance and that it was unlikely that he would be returning before about 11.00 hrs. They were also told that the Brigade were to capture AMAYE and the high ground astride it.

This had been part of the Phase 3 objective of 56 Brigade, not captured yesterday. The O Group moved to an Observation Post from which the objectives could be seen. Here we found the Brigade Commander. The Brigadier's plan was to advance with two Battalions 'up'. On the right was to be the 7th GREEN HOWARDS, supported by A Squadron and on the left the 5th EAST YORKS, supported by B Squadron. H Hour was to be 16.00 hrs. Our sector of the objective was to be AMAYE village and the high ground to the north of it.

The Squadron Leader and the Commanding Officer of the GREEN HOWARDS went forward along with the main road CAUMONT – VILLERS BOCAGE to the leading elements of 43 Infantry Division, from whom we were to take over the advance. These troops were found on a small ridge beyond a 'bridge' on the main road, spanning a ditch which was a tank obstacle. They were some 1200 yards west of AMAYE village, which lay 200 yards to the right of the road in a large area of orchards, about 2½ miles west of VILLERS BOCAGE. The ground to the left of the road and up to the objective was "open". The Commander of these troops informed us that there were no enemy in or on our objective area. This seemed to be an inexactitude, because at that time there was a considerable amount of unmistakeable Spandau fire being directed at, we thought, his forward elements. It was not, therefore, considered to be a suitable area in which to discuss our plan for the advance/attack. We returned to Brigade HQ by about 12.00 hrs. There we were met by the Commander of 43 Division, Major General G I Thomas, who also told us that there were no enemy on the objective; but that it was possible that they would move their armour onto the high ground to oppose our advance, we should therefore capture it with all haste. The Squadron, at this time, were just leaving the harbour area at GRANVILLE under the command of Captain Lyon who had been told to take the Squadron to an Assembly Area for an attack at 16.00 hrs. A radio message was made to Captain Lyon to bring the Squadron as quickly as possible to a forming up position west of the bridge on the main road as H Hour was now to be 13.00 hrs.

The plan, which was agreed with the Battalion Commander and approved by the Brigadier, was that the Squadron would move to occupy the ridge to the north of the village as quickly as possible whilst the Battalion would occupy the village.

Since it would not be possible for the Battalion Commander to hold a Battalion O Group, allow Company Commanders to give out their orders and get the Battalion moving from their location west of the bridge to their start line by 13.00 hrs, it was agreed that one Company would be transported to the village on a troop of tanks and that they would be accompanied by the Battalion's Carrier Platoon, who would come into action to protect their right flank. 2nd Troop was allocated to this task and a 'pick-up' point was agreed. Company HQ was to be carried on the Troop Leader's tank and each other tank in the troop was to carry a Platoon of about 30 men and their kit – quite a crush and a balancing act, especially when travelling across country. Artillery support was to be available to 'stonk' the village, if required, on the codeword 'GATSTONK'. A Forward Observing Officer, RA, was to be made available, to move with the Squadron. He appeared in time for the move but did not know the plan; but knew the codeword. Captain Lyon was to be the Squadron's Liaison Officer with the Battalion HQ.

The Squadron arrived west of the bridge just before 13.00 hrs, having travelled about ten miles to get there from GRANVILLE. There being no time for a Squadron O Group the Squadron Leader gave out his orders over the radio 'on the move'. The Order of March was 3, 4, SHQ, 1. 2nd Troop waited for their Infantry Company. After crossing the bridge 3rd Troop fanned out to the left of the road and were ordered to move direct to the objective. 1st Troop came up on their right to engage

the orchards, if necessary, and 4th Troop moved to the left, to cover the open left flank. As 1st Troop approached the orchards they reported that they were occupied by a considerable number of enemy who they were engaging with maximum fire power.

As 2nd Troop, carrying the Infantry, approached the village they also came under Spandau fire, as did the Carrier Platoon on their right. The Infantry dismounted, in haste, and went to ground. GATSTONK was requested and delivered.

At the end of GATSTONK and when 1st Troop temporarily ceased firing at the orchards a number of the enemy came out from the orchards with their arms aloft and surrendered to 1st Troop. They were waved back towards the Bridge. They willingly complied with the signals given to them.

Having been held up for some time by Spandau fire the Infantry requested that GATSTONK be repeated. This was done and thereafter they made better progress, supported by Captain Lyon and 1st Troop. The advance of the remainder of the Squadron to their objective was unopposed. Initially, 3rd Troop took up 'turret-down' positions on the ridge. Later they were joined by 2nd Troop on their right. 4th Troop continued to keep an eye on the left flank.

By 18.00 hrs the Battalion were in positions in the eastern forward sloping orchards of the village, having taken 8 officers and 50 OR prisoners.

The Squadron moved to a rear rally at 19.30 hrs and harboured in the area of LA REPAS about two miles east of CAUMONT, in a Regimental area. The attack by B Squadron and the E YORKS on our right came in later in the day, arriving on their objective at 19.00 hrs. Unfortunately, Captain was killed* by a sniper, shooting him in the head whilst he was standing in his tank, after the village was captured. Other casualties on the day were Troopers Forsyth, Slankley and Dodson who were wounded when their tank, commanded by Corporal Davis, was bazookered. Later Trooper Dodson died of his wounds. Lieutenant Elliott was wounded in the head by a snipers bullet. These casualties emphasised the dangers to tanks and their crews when located in areas not fully cleared by the Infantry who they were supporting.

It was to be fortunate that the Squadron had not been engaged by any anti-tank guns during their rather hasty advance to their objective, particularly since it would be unlikely that the defenders of AMAYE did not have any.

*Corporal Hennessey, who was the last person to speak to him reported the incident thus – “We had halted in the area of a crossroads when the second-in-command of the Squadron, Captain Peter Lyon, called me over to his tank. I climbed up and spoke to him as we studied his map, I was standing on the side of his tank and he was leaning out of the turret. I jumped down and was walking back to my own tank when I heard the unmistakable sound of a burst of Schmeisser sub-machine gun fire. Captain Lyon lay slumped across the top of his turret, shot through the head by a sniper.”

3rd August “Remained in the LA REPAS Harbour. Capt Lyon’s funeral at 10.00 hrs. Orders to move to area of BOIS DE HOMME later in the afternoon. Route, Tank Track Club then own route to harbour area. Order of March – A, RHQ, C e B. Track extremely difficult and owing to the hot weather was extremely unpleasant. Arrived in the wood about 16.00 hrs. Heavy thunder storm lasted a short time and cleared the atmosphere.

No orders.”

MONT PINCON
129 INFANTRY BRIGADE
43 WESSEX INFANTRY DIVISION

4TH August “A Sqn at two hours to move. Various plans under review, the most popular being to move to THURY HARCOURT on the River ORNE some 20 miles to the east but the most likely

was to capture MONT PINCON (1200 ft), Hill 365, after other Brigades in the Div had captured ONDSFONTAINE and Hill 301. However, at about 18.00 hrs orders were received to form 'Jock' columns with the WILTSHIRES and move by two routes from MESNAL AUSOUF and MONTIGNY.

B Sqn with 4 WILTS were north of the road and C and A Squadrons south of the road carrying KSLI on their tanks. H Hour (20.00 hrs) to cross the main road VILLIERS-VIRE. This, however, was not possible since the Battalion being picked up were to be on the main road BOUREIGNY-VILLERS at 20.30 hrs. The advance from the start line progressed about 2 miles then came to rest owing to (a) right hand route being impassable and (b) on the left route enemy were encountered with which the forward elements were not able to cope. The enemy, however, were withdrawing and it was then decided to harbour in this area. A Sqn now were placed in support of 5 WILTS who were in reserve. We moved to their area but failed to make contact with them as they were not at the location stated."

5th August "Heavy mist during the morning. Enemy had withdrawn. Advance continued but the Southern Column were diverted to the northern route. B Sqn were directed to the crossing over the river at ST JEAN LE BLANC. It was, however, discovered that this crossing was held by the enemy.

At 11.00 hrs A Sqn were ordered to move to TAUTAINERIE where they were to meet the 5 WILTS who were moving across country to this village. We were then about 3 miles SW of it and it was not known what enemy might be encountered en route to this new RV.

Enemy encountered but they were found to be gunners coming into action. This caused some delay. On arrival at the RV we did not find the Infantry but they arrived half an hour later.

The plan now was for the 5 WILTS supported by A Sqn to move to MONT PINCON via CHANTEPIE and LA VARINIERE. There were two wooded ravines (ditches) between us and our objective, both being tank obstacles. The first lay some 2000 yards to the east of the RV and the second about 2000 yards further on. MONT PINCON was a further 2000 yards beyond second ditch. It was a dominating feature on the left of the road along which we were to advance.

By 13.00 hrs the advance started, crossing the first ditch and the ridge of high ground at CHANTEPIE with slight opposition, this being quickly silenced by 2nd Troop.

The Bde Cmdr then decided that he would have three objectives. The first being the crossing of the ditch between CHANTEPIE and LA VARINIERE, the second the village itself and the third being MONT PINCON. The third was actually to be the Bde's objective and it was intended that the 5th WILTS would be the right flank with the KSLI on their left. All went well until the first objective was reached. The Battalion then came under machine gun fire from the eastern bank. The road and bridge were thought to be mined and the ditch was confirmed as being a tank obstacle. From Battalion HQ on the crossroads the CO ordered the attack to take place on the left of the road to secure a bridge-head. The attack was to be made by two Companies supported by two Troops. H Hour was to be at 18.00 hrs and a concentration from Artillery to be laid down on eastern bank. The attack went in, heavy fire support being given by 1st and 4th Troops. The enemy replied by heavy mortaring on our attacking Companies. These Companies, in spite of the fire support, failed to get to the line of the ditch.

The CO made a personal reconnaissance of the bridge and confirmed that it was mined. He then decided that the attack could not achieve results and ordered the leading Companies to consolidate on the western bank. He then ordered that during the night the bridge was to be cleared of mines by RE and that one Company should establish a Bridgehead. The Squadron withdrew at dusk and harboured in the area west of CHAMTEPIE X road.

6th August Captain Denny's account of the operations on this day and briefly of the previous evening is as follows. He had taken over from Captain Lyon as Second in Command of the Squadron.

“The Squadron sat about 200 yards short of the stream which ran across the front from six until dusk and were shelled almost continually. The Infantry suffered heavy casualties. It was not until we got on top of the mountain and looked back to where we had been sitting that we discovered that our position must have been clearly seen by any number of German Artillery forward observing officers, although we thought we were well covered by a huge treed hedge. We were very lucky not to have had any casualties. At dusk we went back and harboured with the Regiment west of CHANTEPIE crossroads.

The next morning at 8 o'clock Lieutenants Elliott's and Watt's troops went out to the position of the previous night to support the leading companies of the 5th Wiltshire Regiment. During this time the Commanding Officer of the 5th Wiltshire Regiment was giving out his orders for the attack on MONT PINCON by his Battalion supported by A Squadron. At 11 o'clock the right hand company supported by Lieutenant Elliott's troop was counter-attacked and Major D B Wormald left the Battalion Commander's order group to go out and deal with the nuisance. This most uncalled for interruption necessitated postponing H Hour from noon till 2 o'clock.

The Squadron Leader came back to the harbour area to give out orders, but, as he came into the corner of the field and blew the inevitable whistle for crew commanders, a heavy 'stonk' came down and held up proceedings for a few minutes. Eventually the O Group formed up in a sunken road, with each person sitting in a slit trench and the Squadron Leader shouting at the top of his voice to make himself heard above the noise of the shells passing overhead. He walked up and down, apparently unconcerned.

At ten to two the barrage opened on the Boche positions on the other side of the stream and by half-past two the two leading companies – or what was left of them, after being heavily shot-up by Spandaus – were over the river. Corporal Hammond then led Lieutenant Elliott's troop over the bridge. They were not able to get off the road, as it was cut into the side of the hill, a sheer bank on one side and a steep drop on the other.

Lieutenant Watt's troop followed and managed to find a way out to the right and took up a position there. By this time the Colonel of the 5th Wiltshire Regiment had been killed and the Battalion, now down to sixty men, was commanded by the Adjutant. The remainder of the Squadron were now over the river, and at this point in the proceedings five Boche Infantry, all armed with bazookas, who had been sitting beside my tank on the road, came out of the hedge and gave themselves up, to my intense relief.

Another concentration was called for on the village of LA VARINIÈRE and when this came down the attack went in with sixty men and was successful. The Squadron was now disposed to the east and north of the village and C Squadron came up on our right flank. At this time forty to fifty Boche who had been bypassed to the left of the road came in and gave themselves up.

The Infantry Brigadier then decided that the 5th Wiltshire Regiment with A Squadron still in support, should push on to the top of the hill. H Hour was to be 6 pm. However, 150 mm shells began bouncing on the crossroads and in LA VARINIÈRE itself. This pinned the Infantry to the ground. Lieutenant Col V A B Dunkerly, commanding the Regiment, was not to be done in by this slight setback, and ordered Major Wormald to send an armoured patrol to the top of the hill, warning him at the same time that there were almost certainly 88 mm anti-tank guns and enemy Infantry in position on the summit. For the best part of two months the Regiment had been fighting in the closest possible co-operation with Infantry, and it was considered a very dangerous performance in the lost Normandy country to advance without Infantry and Artillery support. Therefore, realising that it would almost certainly be my job to command the half squadron which would carry out the patrol, I viewed the future with gravest possible concern and gloom. However, hope, as ever, springing eternal in the human heart, I set off with Lieutenant Elliott's and Lieutenant Jennison's troops to patrol to the top.

We advanced with Lieutenant Jennison's troop leading across a large wheat field, past a small wood on our right, which we shot up, but which did not, in fact, contain any enemy. Then past

some quarries, into one of which Corporal Davies's tank fell and overturned, and finally took up hull-down positions at the base of the hill proper, 2nd Troop right, 3rd Troop left.

Sergeant Rattle's tank (3rd Troop) then had its track blown off by an armour-piercing shot, but from which direction it was impossible to tell. 2nd Troop and myself then laid a smoke screen, the first round of which, for once in a way, bounced absolutely right and blew very slowly in the right direction, completely blotting out the southern half of the position. Lieutenant Jennison's tank then raced to the top of the hill, followed shortly afterwards by Lieutenant Elliott's. During this movement we were not once shot at, the Boche being caught on the top looking east instead of west. By half past six we had seven tanks in an all round defensive position on the summit.

While this had been going on, the Squadron Leader's tank had been hit by a 150 mm and had then gone over a minefield accompanied by another tank just each of LA VARINIÈRE. The Armoured Recovery Vehicle, which went to tow them out, also went up on a mine.

Contrary to expectations, it was much more pleasant at the top than at the bottom of MONT PINCON, as it was a lovely summer evening. At 8 pm the Colonel came up and joined us, but there was still no sign of our Infantry and we began to feel a trifle lonely. Shortly afterwards the remainder of the Squadron came up. As it was getting dark, we pulled into a very close leaguer and the 4th Somerset Light Infantry Regiment began to arrive and dig in around us. Their intelligence officer talked to some Boche who could clearly be heard digging in less than one hundred yards from us, oblivious of our presence. They were made aware of it by a 75 mm shell which went just above their breakfast table next morning.

By this time a thick fog had come down. We were told a few weeks later that the fog was our salvation, as a large German counter-attack, which had formed up and would almost certainly have succeeded in driving us off the position, lost the way in the fog.

During the evening and night of the 6th/7th August, the route from LA VARINIÈRE to the top of the hill was covered by direct enemy fire, which made it, as one rather old-timer gunner Colonel remarked, "a demmed nasty salient".

Next morning B Squadron was given the task of clearing the ridge, which was successfully carried out, and MONT PINCON was finally and firmly in our hands."

As Squadron Leader I should add a few details to the above account. Firstly, at the outset of the attack we did not know for certain whether the bridge had been cleared of mines by the Royal Engineers. We did, however, know that the Battalion had not, during the previous night, established a bridgehead to the east of the bridge. We also knew that the river/stream was in a wooded ravine and that it was an obstacle to tanks.

The Brigade Commander's plan for the day was that two Battalions would continue the attack. On the right would be the 6th WILTSHIRES, supported by A Squadron, whose objective was the village of LA VARINIÈRE and the SW slopes of the hill (Pt 365 as it was shown on the map.) On the left would be the 4th SOMERSET LIGHT INFANTRY whose objective was the summit of the hill, with further task of exploitation to the east. On this flank the terrain was considered to be impossible to tanks.

The Squadron plan was that as soon as the Infantry had established a bridgehead the Squadron would cross the bridge, deploy and lead the Infantry into LA VARINIÈRE, following up an Artillery barrage. B and C Squadrons were in reserve.

The 'inevitable' whistle which I used was 'TL' for Troop Leader and 'CC' for Crew Commanders – in morse.

There was some delay after the opening barrage had lifted from the east bank of the ravine before some Infantry had established themselves on the east bank, during which time the enemy

Spandau and mortar fire was quite intense and inflicted many casualties on them. As Corporal Hammond approached the bridge the enemy tried to demolish it; but this was not successful.

I suppose it was at about 16.00 hrs that the final attack was launched on LA VARINIÈRE, with the Squadron giving maximum 'suppressive' fire, particularly on their left flank where we could see the enemy withdrawing.

Having reached the village I suggested to our CO that another Squadron should be deployed on our right flank, between the river and the village.

After we had taken up our defensive positions to the east and north of the village it was heavily 'stonked' by enemy medium Artillery, during which time I decided to move my tank. There was a large explosion and the tank came to a shuddering halt. I thought that we had been hit by a medium shell. After the 'stonking' ended I decided to dismount from my tank to inspect the damage. As I jumped from the hull I noticed that I was descending with my feet about to land on a German Teller (tank) mine. I separated my feet and landed astride it. I do not know what the consequences would have been if I had not carried out this immediate action! I radioed for the Squadron's Armoured Recovery Vehicle to come to my assistance, which it did; but not before it was engaged by enemy anti-tank weapon from our right flank as it crossed the crossroads in the village. We attached a tow rope to my tank and commenced a tow. There was another explosion. The ARV had also run over a mine and become immobile. Unfortunately two tank crew members were sitting on the front of my tank at the time and they were wounded by the displacement of track plates which we had had welded to the front hull of our tanks to give extra frontal armour, particularly against panzerfausts (an early form of spaced armour!).

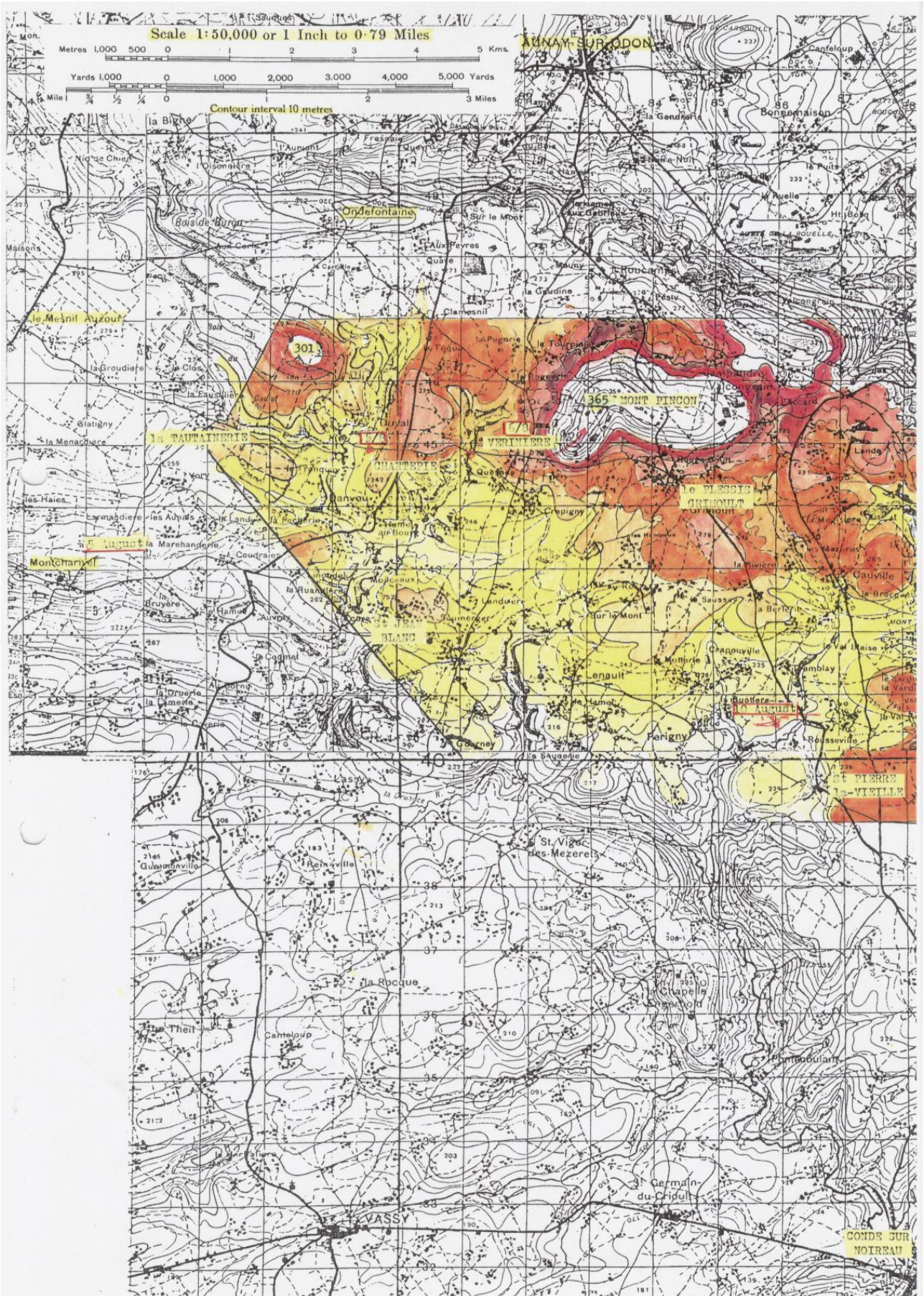
Whilst I was helping to bandage up the casualties Regimental Headquarters arrived. I climbed up on the CO's tank. He told me to get moving to join the other two troops of my Squadron on the summit of the hill. My hands were 'dripping' casualty blood and I explained to him that I had a mobility problem at the moment. He was not impressed. However, as soon as possible, I hitch-hiked/commandeered a lift to the summit on another of my Squadron's tanks. A replacement was not long in arriving – because I always encouraged the Squadron Fitters (section of the Light Aid Detachment) to hold and travel in one or two spare tanks.

I have a notion that it was not the Infantry Brigade Commander's idea to send an Armoured Patrol to the summit of Pt 365 (MONT PINCON) but that of the Divisional Commander (Maj Gen G I – The Butcher – Thomas and/or Brigadier Prior-Palmer. They also ordered an armoured attack upon LE PLESSIS GRIMOULT, which was carried out by C Squadron (a village on the south of MONT PINCON about two miles east of LA VARINIÈRE).

During the day we were fortunate that the enemy had not deployed anti-tank guns or tanks against us. Presumably they considered that the terrain was 'tank proof' and that it could be held by Infantry with 'bazookers'; with which our suppressive fire could deal, whilst we were on the move. Also 7th Armoured Division had been trying to capture the hill from the north for some time and in addition major attacks were being launched further to the east. Therefore, their armour was already committed elsewhere and we had found a soft spot in their defences.

The records of 8th Armoured Brigade describe the action on this day as follows:-

"The 13th/18th Hussars, supporting the 129th Infantry Brigade (43rd Division), made repeated and determined assaults upon the western foothills. Throughout a day of scorching heat the battle raged, but the Infantry became pinned at every fresh attempt. Towards evening, when hope of success had apparently vanished, two troops of the 13th/18th Hussars, led by Captain Denny, found their way across an anti-tank ditch in the face of which the advance had faltered. Regardless, of the German Infantry in thick scrub and a desperately steep escarpment, they drove right on to the table-like summit of the now famous mountain where, completely alone, and surrounded by



the enemy, the troops shot it out until joined by the remainder of the Squadron, and finally the Regiment. At last light thick mist settled down and the Regiment spent the night sharing the summit with the Hun. At intervals the German soldiers wandered right past our tanks. By morning, however, the 4th Somerset Light Infantry and the Wiltshire Regiment had arrived on the top, and during the next day, the remaining Germans were driven out, leaving the mountain in our hands.”

It has been said that MONT PINCON was the key tactical feature in this part of France and that until it was captured further advance was impossible.

7th August “As soon as it was light the Squadron broke from their very close leaguer and deployed into defensive positions on the western end of the hill.”

B Squadron, who had been ordered to clear the remainder of the hill to the east, advanced in thick fog. It was so thick that the Squadron Leader, Major Rugge-Price, decided that the only way to maintain direction was to lead the Squadron on foot with a compass in his hand on a bearing taken from the map to the area of his objective. Thus, he was seen to ‘set off’. After a considerable time we heard tanks approaching our position. We ‘stood-to’, ready to engage them. Out of the fog appeared Major Rugge-Price, still on foot leading his Squadron. His compass having suffered from some deviation, due probably to the proximity to the tanks, had caused him to complete a circle; but in so doing had cleared the enemy from the summit. (A true story!)

“Our position was taken over by the Infantry. Some shelling during the day which 3rd Troop Leader’s tank received a direct hit, which immobilised it. It was only recovered five days later. By midday the Regiment were ordered to move back to rest in the area of LE MESNIL AZOUF, about seven miles NW of MONT PINCON, which was reached at about 16.00 hrs. A further move took place when, about 22.00 hrs, we moved to an area north of VILLERS BOCCAGE, (4 miles NE of LE MESNIL), arriving there at about 01.00 hrs.” (We were now in support of 50 Northumbrian Division, again, who were to advance south from MONT PINCON.)

8th August “Squadron at four hours notice to move. By 11.00 hrs the Regiment were ordered to move to an area north of AUNAY SUR ODON and to be in support of 151 Durham Brigade in the attack south from MONT PINCON towards CONDE SUR NOIREAU, which was to take place this evening. A Squadron was to be in support of the reserve Battalion, the 9th DLI. Captain Denny reported to Battalion HQ DLI at 21.30 hrs. The attack was, however, postponed and no move took place for a further 12 hours.

9th August Regiment moved at 09.00 hrs.

B and C Squadrons were in support of the leading Battalions whilst A Squadron moved to the northern slopes of MONT PINCON, in readiness to support the 9th DLI. A comparatively quiet day, for us! The other Squadrons, with their Battalions, met considerable opposition and advanced about 3000 yds, suffering considerable casualties. They failed to cross a wooded ravine about one mile north of ST PIERRE LE VIRILLE.

The Squadron moved forward to a harbour area south of MONT PINCON at dusk and was ordered to support an attack by the E Yorks (69 Brigade relieving 151 Brigade) who were to attack ST PIERRE at 08.00 hrs tomorrow.

10th August “The Squadron leader went to carry out a reconnaissance for the attack with the CO of the E YORKS at 04.00 hrs. Thick fog. Plan extremely loose. Artillery support bad and attack unlikely to be successful.

The ravine was similar to that which had held up the 5th Wilts, west of MONT PINCON. Deep, wooded and a tank obstacle. The approach to the ravine was across open country as was the country beyond the ravine, leading up to a ridge containing the village, which was the objective. In the thick fog we could only give fire support for the Infantry until they entered the ravine. Here was

a road bridge on the left of the immediate area of the attack which we intended to cross as soon as the Infantry emerged on the far side of the ravine. We were then to lead them into the objective, with maximum 'suppressive' fire.

"The Squadron were in position to support the attack at 08.00 hrs. The Infantry were seen to enter the ravine; but failed to emerge on the far side. Apparently the opposition was too strong. There was nothing more that we could do, at that stage.

The whole Squadron had been deployed to give the initial fire support; but they were in open country on a forward slope. This was acceptable in the fog but suddenly at about 09.00 hrs the fog lifted and we were engaged by an anti-tank weapon from west of ST PIERRE. The target was Lieutenant Hunter's tank of 2nd Troop which was on my right. We immediately engaged the area from which the shot had been fired with HE and smoke. No further shots were fired by the enemy but sadly Lieutenant Hunter's tank had been hit and penetrated in the turret killing the turret crew (Lieutenant Hunter, Trooper Brown 80 and Trooper Burgoyne). The driver escaped unhurt and the tank did not 'brew-up'.

"3rd Troop reported that two Panther Tank crews 'bailed out' and a third was thought to have been hit as it did not fire again. From then on the enemy positions were kept under continuous fire, or smoked off.

About midday we decided to try to cross the road bridge. This was done by 1st Troop who then engaged a number of enemy Infantry and destroyed two SP anti-tank guns.

"At 17.00 hrs an attack was to be launched by a reserve Company. This attack did not take place and at dusk the situation was stabilised with the GREEN HOWARDS taking over from the E YORKS on the high ground to the north of ST PIERRE and the E YORKS holding the north side of the ravine. The Squadron leagured in the area of the E YORKS Bn HQ.

11th August "Released at 08.30 hrs and returned to Regimental harbour area. Stayed in this area for the rest of the day.

12th August Long promised rest period due to begin but B and C Squadrons first had to support an attack by DLI Bde on LA FORGE area about two miles SW of ST PIERRE. A Squadron would not be required during the day but had to move to the northern slopes of MONT PINCON whilst SRY took over harbour area.

At 16.00 hrs CO ordered two Troops to be sent to support DLI in mopping up some orchards east of LA FORGE. 1st and 4th Troops under Captain Denny arrived in Bn area at 17.00 hrs. Attack due to start at 17.30 hrs. Squadron retained by Bn Cmdr until dusk. Some prisoners were taken. Tanks then withdrew and replenished. Move then took place to rest area about 5 miles NW of AUNAY SUR ODON, arriving at about midnight. This was really the first rest since 17th July when we left the Chateau at Cazelle.

13th – 17th August Rest period. Evening of 17th moved to harbour area south of LE PLESSIS GRIMAULT.

18th August Orders issued at 07.30 hrs to move to ARGENTAN. By 11.00 hrs we had reached about some 7 miles south of CONDE SUR NOIREAU. Order of march A, RHQ, C, B Regiment in support of 151 Durham Bde. No further move today owing to the bridge at COURTEILLES having been blown up. O Group Conference this evening with 8 DLI with a view to further advance.

19th August Plot for further advance cancelled. Move at 07.30 hrs to join Regiment in harbour at MEGUILLAUME. Enemy situation somewhat obscure. Bridge at COURTEILLES still not clear.

20th August Move at 06.00 to COURTEILLES via bridge and in rear of Durham Bde. Temperature rose in area of COURTEILLES CHATEAU, some two miles from the river. At 15.00 hrs we were on

the road again to SENTILLY, four miles west of ARGENTAN and were now beginning to pass all sorts of enemy equipment which had been wrecked by RAF or destroyed by the enemy in retreat. Four Tigers and five Panthers and numerous horse drawn vehicles of all types were observed. Reconnoitred defensive position facing ARGENTAN. 4 Armd bde coming up on our left.

151 Durham Bde between us at FORET DE GOUFFERN which is possibly occupied by the enemy. Rained all night.

21st August Move to POSAGNES. More enemy equipment lying about. Several Tigers and 88s. At 14.00 hrs we moved again through FORET DE GOUFFERN to CHATAEU BAIRELLE which was apparently used as Enemy Div HQ (wireless set and duplicator captured here). The chateau overlooks the Falaise Gap and was occupied by American troops. Extremely unpleasant smell of dead horses continually blowing up. Rained hard all night. Certain members of the Squadron resorted to some equitation.

22nd August More equitation during morning. RSM's display. Move at short notice at 15.30 hrs to FOUGY. US Troops report having taken 5000 prisoners from the FORET DE GOUFFERN.

23rd August Ordered at short notice to form a Battalion Group with a Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry.

Passed by the Inns of Court Regiment, who were meant to be ahead of us in our advance towards the R SEINE.

Arrived in the area of the FORET DE BRETUILE with DLI. CO decided that the use of tanks in his task of clearing the Foret would not be practicable; but he held the Squadron in reserve until 15.30 hrs when it proceeded to the Regimental harbour area near FRANCEVILLE. The FORET had, apparently, already been cleared by the Americans. We expect to cross the R SEINE tomorrow.

24th August Bridge over the R SEINE not yet secured. No move.

25th and 26th August Still no move.

27th August Orders to move received during the morning, whilst playing cricket, to an area south of VERNON in readiness to cross the SEINE. Moved at 16.00 hrs to the FORET DE CONCHES.

28th August 00.30 hrs orders received to move 03.15 hrs to ST COLUMBUS south of VERNON. Arrived 09.00 hrs. At 15.30 hrs we were told to cross the river at 16.40 hrs. By fast movement this was almost achieved. Harboured about 3 miles north of the river; but no orders for further movement received until 23.00 hrs.

29 August Squadron Leaders conference ended at 01.00 hrs. This revealed that 8th Armoured Brigade, operating for the first time as a Brigade, are to lead the advance to the R SOMME at AMIENS (75 miles to the north of VERNON) with the Americans on our right (later to be relieved by the Guards Armoured Division) and with 11th Armoured Division on our left. The Squadron was to form the Advance Guard with B Company of the 12/60th KRRC, commanded by Major William Deeds (now Lord Deeds – ex The Daily Telegraph).

Move at 06.00 hrs. 12/60th Scout Platoon and 3rd Troop, commanded by Captain Denny to form the Van Guard. The Main Guard being the remainder of the Squadron, the Company plus the 12/60th MG Platoon and a section of Royal Engineers. Immediate advance was delayed by a crater being filled in by RE one mile beyond the start point. No information available regarding the enemy but after moving about one mile the local inhabitants reported that the enemy were in the village of FOURTES. First contact was made by the Scout Platoon, which was engaged by an anti tank weapon, resulting in the loss of one carrier. An attempt by the Scout Platoon, supported by 3rd Troop to clear the enemy were not successful. My appreciation of the situation was that as the

enemy village was in a valley, on the axis of our advance, with a wooded hill to the left and a fairly open hill on the right, a frontal attack, unless supported by Artillery fire, would only result in unnecessary casualties and would not clear the axis. I considered that the best move would be to outflank the enemy position on the right and threaten his withdrawal capability.

A combination of these actions was undertaken. The Regimental Reconnaissance Troop undertook a left flanking movement with the loss of two tanks whilst B Squadron moved round on the high ground on the right flank, also with some casualties.

After three concentrations of fire, directed by our FOO, Captain Taylor MC of the Essex Yeomanry (who were the Field Regiment of 8th Armoured Brigade) the village was entered by B Company supported by the Squadron. The enemy withdrew to BRAY DE LUC and the advance continued until contact was again made.

Later in the day the Squadron were ordered to seize and hold the high ground about two miles north of GUERNEY. This was achieved without incident. Due to the fact that the KRRC were ordered to hold the bridge at DANGU they were not able to relieve the Squadron at dusk and we therefore harboured the night near VESSLEY.

30 August The Regiment was now in Brigade reserve. The route was changed, due to the fact that the leading Regiment reported that there were Tiger Tanks on the road north of GISSORS. We moved from VESSLEY at about 10.00 hrs. Order of march – B, RHQ, A, C. B Squadron made contact with the enemy at LA HOUSOYE. We expected to be ordered to execute an outflanking movement, which was not ordered.

31 August “Still held up by enemy, who had withdrawn but the KRRC Recce elements had not yet reported the route clear and the route now belonged to the Gds Armd Div. At midday Brigade Commander arrived and issued orders for the Regiment to move north of Beauvais on Heart Route via a diversion. Move took place at 14.00 hrs. Order of march – RHQ, A, B, C. Arrived in the area of ORES MEAUX about six miles south of AMIENS at about 20.00 hrs. Reception a little uncertain as this village has been destroyed during the past two wars. Harboured the night. No further orders until 23.30 hrs.

1 September “Squadron Leaders Conference at 06.00 hrs. No maps available! Advance maps arrived later by air. Intention now being to advance “three-up”, Guards Armd Div on right, 8 Armd Bde on centre and 11 Armd Div on the left, all the way into BELGIUM. On the morning of the 3rd September it was intended to drop three Airborne Divs in the area of LILLE to clear up the industrial area in that vicinity and move the Armoured Divisions plus 50 Div to BRUSSELLS, ALORST and ANTWERP on the 4th September. The Regiment were in reserve. The Brigade advanced with SRY being on the right and 4/7 DGs on the left. Move to take place at 08.30 hrs via Diamond Route which was via DOULLENS, ARRAS, south of LILLE, OUDINARDE to ALORST. However, the intention for this day was to establish a Brigade firm base north of the R SOMME in the area of DOULLENS, IVERGNY and ARRAS. The Regimental objective was to be IVERGNY. The Regiment crossed the R SOMME west of AMIENS and advanced towards DOULLENS (20 miles north of AMIRNS) where there was some delay whilst the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry were trying to clear the area.

On the orders of the Corps Commander (Lieutenant Gen Horrocks – 30 Corps) the Regiment were ordered to carry out a right flanking movement in order to cut off the enemy withdrawing from DOULLENS and ST POL (a further 15 miles north of DOULLENS and 20 miles west of ARRAS). Order of march A, RHQ, C, B.

Immediately after the Squadron O Group Lieutenant Jennison was killed whilst mounting his tank by the accidental firing of the main armament of the tank behind him in the column.

Due to the absence of any information concerning the enemy I decided to move the Squadron ‘tactically’ – one leading troop supported by others from hull-down or covered positions. The

Commanding Officer came on the 'air' and asked 'what was holding us up'. My reply was 'tactical movement'. I was then instructed to 'Get a move on'. At this I was irritated and so took over the lead tank position and moved forward at the maximum speed of the Squadron. After meeting no opposition for some distance I instructed 2nd Troop to take over the lead. Upon reaching the area of LEUCHEAUX 2nd Troop reported that the wood on the left of the village was occupied by the enemy. This opposition we were ordered to 'by-pass'. The enemy surrendered to RHQ. We were then ordered to clear the villages of NEAUVILLETTE, LESOUGH and IVERIGNY. In each case this was achieved by outflanking movements by two troops. No active opposition was encountered. The Regiment harboured in the area of IVERIGNY. No enemy were caught withdrawing from DOULLENS.

During the day of Firefly (17 pdr – petrol engined) tanks ran out of petrol; but rejoined in the harbour area.

2 September Lieutenant Townsend Green joined the Squadron and took over command of 3rd Troop.

Sergeant Hammond captured two German Officers and two ORs in a Citroen car. Car taken by the Squadron Fitters – later used by Officers to visit Brussels, etc.

3 September No movement expected before midday.

The Corps plan is still for Guards Armoured Division to move to BRUSSELS and for 11 Armoured Division to move to ANTWERP. 8th Armoured Brigade to come under command of 50 Division to move to ALORST.

The Regiment were in support of the 151 DURHAMS Brigade. After some delay on the start point we proceeded slowly south west of LA BASSE and LILLE. B and C Squadrons were in support of 6 and 9 DLI respectively. A Squadron was in reserve located in WINGLES. 1st and 4th Troops proceeded on patrol for observation of main road LE BASSE – LOOS but did not encounter the enemy. They were u/c Capt Stancomb who had rejoined the Regiment this day. On the north flank it was reported by the patrol that there were two tanks in the vicinity of the Colliery. This proved to be incorrect. The patrol later on in the day obtained information of the passing of the 11th Armd Div on our left flank. At approximately 22.00 hrs patrols were recalled. Several reports were received during the day of enemy concentrations and movements, chiefly originating from the FFI but most of them appeared to have been without foundation. They were mostly movement of our own troops.

4th September Still in Regtl reserve. Remain in the area of WINGLES until lunch time. Move took place to GONDECOURT five miles west of SECLIN. Liberation of LILLE took place. Situation still confused to the NW. Some mortaring from the enemy this evening.

5th September Remain in GONDECOURT area and are told that we are likely to remain here for three or four days. Situation to the east clear. Passion wagon to MERIGNIES.

(The Squadron Leader and Captain Stancomb (the new second in command) took this opportunity to visit MONCHY LE PREUX, a village about 8 miles east of ARRAS, just off the main road from ARRAS to CAMBRAI, where the Squadron had been billeted for most of the 'phony' war in 1939-40. The village was on a hill which had, during the 1914-18 war, been the most important strategic feature east of VIMY Ridge.

It had, therefore, changed hands several times and was surrounded by evidence of the defensive battle; even boxes of .303 ammunition were still in the dug-outs.

At MONCHY they visited the farmhouse of the LEROUX family, where the Squadron Mess had been located. The LEROUX family welcomed them and, amongst other things, told them that the Mayor of the village had been arrested as a "Collaborateur". This man had, at the invitation of

Wilfred Davies (the then Squadron Leader) been a regular visitor to our Mess at 6 pm, a time at which Wilfred expected all officers to be present to drink whisky. After each drink the Mayor would say 'merci, merci' and indicate with his hands that he did not require another drink; Wilfred interpreted 'merci' as 'thank you, please' and would 'top-up' his glass. Eventually M le Mayor would stagger off to his chateaux at the top of the hill. Maybe he was a spy! Before being located in this house the Mess had been in a small cottage where after dinner one evening a friend of the good lady of the house was heard to say 'il pleut a verse' whereupon the lady replied 'mais non c'est Monsieur le Commandant encore' (Wilfred). At that time our French Liaison Officer was a very jolly and hearty Sergeant Chef (Sgt Major) Berteignan of the Chasseur Alpine who wore blue uniform, an enormous beret and even larger boots, studded with climbing irons. On a cold morning he would clatter round the breakfast table and rub the ears of the Squadron 2I/C, one Captain Sir Ian (s - to Bertie, as he was known) Wood with his cold hands. Naturally Ian would tell him to go away! When he received his first letter from home Ian remarked 'ah Bertie, we now know that you really are – a f---ing Cook Sergeant. Bertie exploded and rushed off to the Liaison Officer at RHQ and demanded to be returned to his Regiment which was stationed in the Maginot Line from thence Bertie heard reports that their officers and men were being decorated with Le Creux de Gueur and Le Legion D'Honneur whilst, as he said, poor little Bertie's breast is bare!

Bertie was replaced by a very charming Corporal in the Infantry, Le Viscomte de Dufors, who returned to England with us from DUNKIRK, saddened by the loss of France but even more so by the loss of his pair of Purdey guns to the Germans.)

They arrived back at 19.00 hrs to find Regiment ready to move. Orders not received and so we remain at GONDECOURT.

6th September Stand by to move at 07.00 hrs. Still no orders. They eventually are issued at 10.00 hrs when it is learned that we are to move to NINOVE, a journey of some 50 miles by road. Route via SECLIN, TOURNAI, RENAIX to NINOVE following up the axis of Guards Arm'd Div. Harbour north of NINOVE was reached at dusk. Four tanks did not arrive owing to usual trouble with their rubbers (shedding rubber of the roadwheels).

Crossing the ESCAUT Canal at TOURNAI reminded the Squadron Leader and some other members of the Squadron of their previous crossing of the Canal at TOURNAI on the 19th May 1940, in the other direction. Then as Lieutenant Wormald, he had ordered half of the Squadron to drive their tanks and carriers into the Canal, in order to avoid them being of use to the enemy. The background to this event is recorded thus in the Regimental History:-

"The story of A Squadron during the 18th and 19th must now be told. When Major Davies left the Regiment on the evening of the 18th May, he was ordered to report to HQ 5th Division at WODECQ. He was told that his task would be to cover the bridges over the river DENDRE between LESSINES and GRAMMONT. Major Davies thereupon ordered his Squadron to rendezvous just west of GRAMMONT, whilst he went with Major Russell to HQ 5th Division. The road was very congested and near OGY he met the GOC 5th Division in his car going in the opposite direction. From the conversation which ensued, Major Davies concluded that his Squadron was not required to come under command of 5th Division; being rather puzzled by this apparent change of orders, he went on to WODECQ but found that Headquarters 5th Division had left. He then decided to report to Headquarters 1 Corps at FLOBECQ, where he arrived just after 1 am on the 19th. Here he received a cordial welcome from a Staff Captain who exclaimed: "Thank God you have turned up. I have been waiting for you and Lieutenant Colonel Lumsden (12th Lancers), and I have just heard that he is on his way." A few minutes later Lieutenant Colonel Lumsden came in.

Major Davies's Squadron was placed under command of Lieutenant Colonel Lumsden, who ordered him to hold a sector of the line along the river DENDRE until noon on the following day, with the 12th Lancers on his right: but what units he would find on his left was not known. On completion of this task he was to retire across the ESCAUT by the bridge at TOURNAI and come into reserve. All the bridges over the river DENDRE were reported to have been destroyed.

Major Davies then returned to his Squadron and gave out his orders to his troop leaders. The troops moved up and were soon in their positions. When daylight came, it was found that the bridges had been only partially blown, and that, in at least two cases, Armoured Fighting Vehicles could easily cross. But all was quiet and at noon in accordance with orders the Squadron began to withdraw. Nos 2 and 5 Troops on the right moved back via FLOBECQ – ELLEZELLES – RENAIX unmolested, and at 5.30 pm reached LA VERDERIE where they were joined by the remainder of the Regiment on the following day. Nos 1, 3, 4 and 6 Troops, who were on the left had a more exciting experience. This part of the Squadron had been ordered to retire independently via NEDERBRAKEL and RENAIX.” (Here I expand on the record of the event as described in the history).

Shortly after they had started to move back, they were halted on the main road a few miles east of RENAIX, by a Staff Officer to General Alexander, who was standing beside the road. (General Alexander was the GOC of 1st Division, to which we were the Reconnaissance Regiment). I remember that he was, as usual, impeccably ‘turned-out’. Wearing a ‘Herbert Johnson’ cap, shining boots and breeches. I was beckoned by the Staff Officer to dismount and told to speak to the General. He seemed pleased to see me and explained to me that the right flank of the Infantry had been left completely open. The Infantry being the 3rd Brigade and that the reason was that the transport which should have arrived to lift them to France had not turned up. Also that it was not expected to arrive until about 6 pm.

He ordered me to establish a defensive screen to the south of their position and to hold out at all costs until 3rd Brigade had been withdrawn. By this time Squadron HQ was well on its way to France and were not in contact with us on the radio. I could not, therefore, explain the situation to the Squadron Leader and, being the senior officer in our ‘column’, had to take command of the operation by the four Troops which had been ‘caught’ by General ‘Alex’. The history continues thus:-

“Lieutenant Wormald selected three bounds for his delaying action, and, by 3 pm his troops were in position in the forward bound which was found clear of the enemy. A short time later No 4 Troop reported enemy approaching LA LIVARD and No 1 Troop became completely surrounded near OGY. The latter was ordered to get out as best it could, and the Troop Sergeant broke his way through but, taking orders rather too literally, retired to TOURNAI. At 3.35 pm permission was given to retire to the second bound, a few miles in rear. Half an hour later No 4 Troop opened fire at 600 yards on enemy advancing up the road, and inflicted some casualties. Shortly afterwards, permission was given to retire to the third bound. About five o’clock a troop of the 17th Field Regiment opened fire on FLOBECQ, and this helped to delay the enemy. A few minutes later, a message was received from Headquarters Infantry Brigade to say that they expected to be embossed in about an hours time. The troops hung on to their positions without serious difficulty till 7.45 pm.”

My memory of the event is that at about 7.30 pm, having not received any information or orders from 3 Brigade for some time I decided to send the Squadron Dispatch Rider (Trooper Cheal – who was my gunner of some fame at St Honorine in June ‘45 and then our co-driver and tank crew cook) to Brigade HQ. I was becoming concerned about our future!

Trooper Cheal returned quite quickly. He reported that the house in which the Brigade HQ had been located was ablaze and that there were no British soldiers to be seen anywhere around it. Nor had he seen any on his journey to or from the Brigade HQ. Furthermore, he had been strafed by enemy aircraft on his return journey.

I had a brief discussion with Lieutenant Stancomb, who was commanding 3rd (carrier) Troop, as a result of which I decided to order the withdrawal of the ‘flank protection’ force to France, as what seemed to me to be the alternative of being a small pocket of resistance to the German army, somewhere in Belgium! As we hastened along our original axis of withdrawal through RENAIX to TOURNAI we saw no British troops.

We reached the bridge in TOURNAI at dusk to find it demolished; but the superstructure of it, above the water, was negotiable on foot. The 'Sapper' officer on the far side of the bridge informed me that all the bridges over the canal had been 'blown'. There was some heavy machine gun firing to our left. It seemed to me that there were two alternative options:-

1. To turn about and to drive northwards in order to find a bridge that might not have been demolished. Furthermore, to do so in the dark.
2. To abandon our vehicles and to try to reach LA VERINIÈRE (the original destination of the Squadron).

I quickly decided to adopt the second option.

In order to prevent the enemy from making use of our vehicles, for any purpose, I ordered the drivers 'start up', jump out of their vehicles and let them move forward over the canal bank into the canal. This they did. All the crews then crossed the remnants of the bridge, got 'fell-in' and marched to LA VERINIÈRE, arriving there at about 01.30 am for a warm welcome by the Squadron Leader of a cup of tea – or something. Two days later we had been re-equipped, maybe at the expense of C Squadron, and were operational again.

7 September It is expected that we remain in this area for three days. Capt Denny went to BRUSSELS to collect pay. O Gp at 11.00 hrs but no orders issued until 15.30 hrs when we are told to proceed to AERSCHOT, (10 miles north of LOUVAIN and about 50 miles from NINOVE). Route via BRUSSELS and LOUVAIN. Harbour night in the area south of AERSCHOT at dusk. Good reception from civilian population.

O Gp is called at about 22.00 hrs when large number of maps issued. Plan is that we move at 04.30 hrs tomorrow to cross the ALBERT CANAL at BERINGEN. 8 Armd Bde would bring in a right hook to the village of GHEEL about 12 miles west of BERINGEN, the Guards having first secured crossing over the canal. We would then push on to TURNHOUT, (12 miles to the north). This plan was considered somewhat ambitious. A Squadron were to lead. Maps were sorted and an outline of the plan was given to Troop representatives at 01.30 hrs.

8 September Move ordered for 04.30 hrs. Cpl Preston and Tpr Cheal absent and only managed to rejoin as the Squadron is moving off. Very dark and cold. Squadron were to fall in behind KRRC who were in turn behind 4/7 DGs. Coln to marry up at AERSCHOT. Move takes place satisfactorily and at 07.00 we were passing through DIEST. Here we ran in amongst the Guards Armd Div who were waiting for the Bridgehead area to be cleared before continuing their advance towards the ESCAUT CANAL. At about 10.00 hrs 8 Armd Bde are ordered on to the road to take up their road space. They have been in harbour adjacent to the road. They take up positions on road and stay there for four or five hours. (Double banking with the Guards Armoured Division and 'nose to croup'. A 'Falaise' air target. Fortunately we had complete air superiority.)

Eventually move at very slow speed and after crossing the canal start on our expedition to GHEEL. 4/7 Dgs leading with KRRC do not make very much headway and come to rest in the area of OUISTHAM about 4 miles NW of BERINGEN. Regiment comes into harbour in the BEVERLOO area with the enemy on our left flank and also suspected to be on our left rear.

After crossing the bridge at BERINGEN it was interesting to see many Sherman tanks on the side of the road or in the ditch, having been 'brewed-up' by anti-tank weapons located on their flanks. I wondered whether smoke had been used to cover these flanks, after crossing the canal! The road was elevated with deep ditches on either side.

9 September Remain in the BEVERLOO area all day. No enemy seen. However, A1 Ech were attacked between 07.00 and 03.00 hrs by an enemy force which was reported to have marched from the Dutch frontier to destroy the bridge at BERINGEN. They approached the Squadron Echelon shortly after stand down when most people were having breakfast. Tpr Belson was killed

and L/C Cubbitt wounded in the shoulder necessitating his removal and subsequent evacuation to UK. Five Squadron lorries were destroyed and a jeep which Captain Stancomb had brought with him a week or so ago. In addition quite a large amount of personal kit was destroyed on these vehicles and also a "valuable" cargo of butter, eggs and gin which were on the jeep. Troopers Jackson and Scargill put up good performances. Trooper Jackson after assisting to carry L/C Cubitt engaged the enemy with a Bren. He reports having seen a goodly number (at least twenty) lined up near the canal as if being given orders what to do. He was in a good position with his Bren and opened fire, the results being that the enemy withdrew. Trooper Scargill succeeded in driving his lorry out of danger although there were several other vehicles in the vicinity which had received direct hits and were well ablaze. He also then engaged the enemy with a Bren gun, shooting from an upstairs window of a nearby house. He also accounted for two prisoners.

At dusk Squadron took over a line facing north from GOSPEL to crossroads in BEVERLOO with one Platoon of KRRC under command. Troops moved into position and met no opposition. Slight shelling of crossroads where 3rd Troop in occupation. No casualties.

10 September Remain in same position. Nothing to report.

11 September Still at GOSPEL. 2nd Troop move to railway crossing half way to BOURG LEOPOLD (Belgian Army Armoured Centre) in support of B Squadron who have carried out a successful recce. Enemy clear of that town. Belgian Brigade take over line.

12 September Still on GOSPEL line.

No information received. Carry on as previous day, with maintenance. There have been reports during the last three days of enemy in the wooded area to the NW, strength varying from 3000 to nil, so it is difficult to estimate enemy situation but it is thought that the enemy have most probably withdrawn from the whole area. Slight shelling of crossroads continues. It is noticeable that when the enemy shelling becomes nearer all the flags of liberation are suddenly hauled down from the houses. This is always a good indicator of the closeness of the enemy. Troops have baths at the Colliery Baths.

13 September B Squadron take over BEVERLOO line at 07.00 hrs. Squadron return to colliery area.

14 September Withdrawn to alongside railway siding. Maintenance.

15 September Regiment concentrate at school at BEVERLOO preparatory to the last battle of the War (on paper!!). MARKET GARDEN.

16 September Same position. Passion trips to BRUSSELS and LOUVAIN.

17 September Move to area in the wood near HECHTEL. Route somewhat uncertain cross country. Guards by this time are still holding a small Bridgehead over the ESCAULT CANAL at NEERPELT. It is not yet known in what role we shall be employed.

18 – 20 September No change. Same position.

MARKET GARDEN

This was the code name given to the operation, proposed by F M MONTGOMERY, and accepted by SACEUR, which employed the Allied Airborne Corps to capture a series of bridges over water obstacles in Holland to enable his army to make a rapid advance into the North German Plain. The operation started on the 16th September when 300 bombers attacked 'flak' installations in the ARNHEM area. On the 17th September 800 'Fortresses' of the US Airforce attacked targets along the fly-in route of the Airborne Divisions. The Divisional objectives were roughly as follows:

101st US AB Division – The bridges over the Wilhilmena canal at ZON and VEGEL, north of EINDHOVEN, and the town of EINDHOVEN.

82ⁿ US AB Division – The crossings over the R MASS (MEUSE) and the R WAAL, south and north of NIGMEGEN.

1st BRITISH AB Division – The bridge over the lower RHINE at ARNHEM. 'MARKET', the operations by the US Divisions were successful whilst 'GARDEN' by our Division, was a failure.

The GUARDS Armoured Division was to lead 30 British Corps to link up with the Airborne Divisions. They were followed by 8th Armoured Brigade and 43 Infantry Division.

21st September We commenced our advance, behind the Guards Armoured Division, towards NIGMEGEN. The Squadron was under command 12th/60th KRRC, the Motor Battalion of 8th Armoured Brigade. Our original task was to capture and hold the crossing over the R EIZSEL at DUISBURG. However 101 US AB Division were threatened by enemy armour attack from the east and we were put under command of a Colonel ZINC, who commanded a US Combat Team. We saw no enemy but he was pleased to have us under his command.

On the road where we crossed the canal at VALKENAARD we were impressed by the sight of some ten 'brewed-up' Sherman tanks, which had been the property of the IRISH GUARDS. We were not surprised when we saw the 88 mm AA gun, used in the ground role, which had engaged them. The GUARDS had been advancing on a 'one-tank-up' axis, maybe without 'smoke'.

We harboured the night at RIEL, in support of the KRRC, who were holding a line east of EINDHOVEN with 101 US AB on their left and 43 Division Reconnaissance Regiment on their right.

22 September Remain at RIEL until 1400 hrs when we formed up to carry out a night march towards NIGMEGEN. Moved off at 21.00 hrs. Some troops got lost in EINDHOVEN but fortunately managed to catch up with the column in ZOORN. Our main preoccupation during the journey was not get lost or deviate from the axis and, thereby drive into the enemy who were still in occupation of positions on either side of the axis. It was a dark night and the route had not been 'signed' or 'policed'. In fact, during the day, the enemy had attacked the axis, held by the 101st AB Division, at ST OEDENRODE north of EINDHOVEN.

23 September We arrived at a harbour area at OVERASSELT at about 07.00 hrs, having been on the road for about 10 hours. The final section of the journey was under extremely dusty conditions. We were ready for a sleep and clean up, also food.

At about 10.00 hrs orders received from KRRC that we were to take part in an operation at 14.00 hrs. O Group at 11.00 hrs, when orders were issued for Operation 'PHUKKIT'. The task given to the Battalion, with the Squadron under command, was to seize and hold the main road bridge at ARNHEM:

Information about the enemy was practically nil and about our own troops was much the same. It was not even known whether the Airborne Troops were holding the bridge or not, but it was known that the leading elements of the Guards Armoured Division had only penetrated about 3000 yards beyond the bridge over the R WALL at NIGMEGEN. The plan, which was drawn up between the Squadron Leader and the CO of the KRRC Battalion was that the Squadron carrying C Company of the Battalion would form up in the railway siding, just north of the river bridge at NIGMEGEN, and that after concentrations by Field and Medium Artillery on the area south of the ARNHEM bridge, we would advance 'flat out' to seize the bridge. Order of march, 1st Troop, moving two up down the main road, followed by 2nd Troop carrying a platoon of C Company, SHQ then 3rd and 4th Troops each carrying a platoon of Infantry. This column was to be followed by two Companies of the KRRC, who were to clear 100 yards each side of the road in the factory area (beyond the bridge?). The Squadron was to 'stand-by' ready to move at 16.00 hrs. The operation was then

postponed by one hour and it was then thought to be a little doubtful as to whether it would take place and by 17.00 hrs it became obvious that it would not take place today.

A conference now took place at Battalion HQ, attended by the Brigade Commander (Brigadier Prior-Palmer). He decided to lay on a slightly modified operation, with the same objective, for the following day with more Artillery support. He agreed that during the advance all possible tank and anti-tank sites on each side of the axis of advance should be engaged by Artillery firing a mixture of HE and smoke. All the Infantry were now to be carried in half-track vehicles, which were to be dispersed within the Squadron column. This plan was issued to tank Crew Commanders.

The Guards Division had still not managed to make any further progress beyond ELST, about 3 miles north of NIGMEGEN and half way to ARNHEM.

We were all a bit apprehensive about the outcome of the operation and slept a little uneasily during the night. However, it had at least now been agreed that the operation would not take place until the INNS of COURT Regiment (armoured cars) reported that the village of ELDEN, about two miles south of ARNHEM bridge, was clear of enemy. Information about the enemy was scanty and the position of our Airborne forces north of the bridge was still nil. Obviously, however, the opposition was stronger than was initially forecast. (It turned out to be the surviving elements from Normandy, of 9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions, who were being re-equipped in the area.)

As indicated by the revised plan, I had told the Brigadier that I considered that if the operation was to have any possible chance of success then the enemy astride the axis must be prevented from engaging us and also that I would prefer that the operation be undertaken in the dark. I realised that we were likely to encounter mines; but I hoped that by travelling at maximum speed the leading tanks which struck the mines would carry on, through momentum, and swing clear of the road. The task meant that some risks had to be taken! It will never be known whether my plan would have been successful in reaching the bridge. (In fact, our Airborne troops at the north end of the bridge had been forced to surrender on the 21st September, having captured it on the 17th September.)

24 September At 02.00 hrs a message was received from KRRC that the Squadron was now to be under command of 43rd Division and in support of the 4th DORSETS. This implied that Operation PHUKKIT was 'off'. (Thank God – it had seemed to me that our Brigadier had been a little optimistic in assuming that A Squadron with the 12th/60th KRRC could achieve what the whole of the Guards Armoured Division had failed to achieve. On the other hand they had not made the attempt with our tactical plan or in the dark!)

At 04.00 hrs orders were received from RHQ instructing us to marry-up with the 4th DORSETS NW or NIGMEGEN at 07.00 hrs. The task of the 4th DORSETS was to make contact with the Airborne troops west of ARNHEM and to join them by means of an assault crossing of the Lower Rhine. The Squadron started to move at 06.30 hrs but progress was slow and most of the day was spent sitting on the railway bridge over the R WAAL on the northern outskirts of NIGMEGEN. Eventually we reached the hamlet of HOENHOT, about two miles south of the R RHINE, where we met up with the 4th DORSETS. Advanced to DRIEL, just south of the river, west of the railway line NIGMEGEN-ARNHEM; the territory beyond which, to the east, was still held by the enemy. We assumed defensive positions, facing east and west.

25 September 4th DORSETS carried out an assault crossing of the river, to link up with the remnants of the Airborne Division thought to be still holding out in the area of OOSTERBEEK. The Squadron could not give fire support to the assault, because we did not know the positions of our own troops, if any, on the far bank. Of the two companies which crossed the river very few survived to be withdrawn. The casualties were 15 officers, including the CO and about 220 OR.

THE ISLAND
(The Bridgehead north of the R MASS at NIGMEGEN
And the R RHINE at ARNHEM)

26 September Slight adjustment in our positions, to improve amenities and to concentrate on the Squadron, except 1st Troop who were ordered to the crossroads on the GHEEL-ELST road facing east.

27 September 3rd Troop were ordered to move to area of 5 DCLI, who were facing the railway line east and north of ELST. They did not come under command of the DCLI but under direct command of the 130 Brigade with whom the Regiment is being prepared to undertake a small operation in support of the DCLI. Subsequently cancelled.

28 September B and C Squadrons withdrawn into reserve whilst A Squadron take over the support of two Battalions of 130 Brigade and one of 129 Brigade. The allocations and locations were as follows:-

Squadron HQ in a farm south of HAMOET.

1st Troop to 5 DORSETS in DRIEL.

2ND Troop to 7 HANTS west of GHEEL. Both facing the LOWER RHINE.

3rd Troop to 5 DCLI and later 5 WILTS, last seen at Mont Pincon, facing the railway line south of DRIEL.

4th Troop in support of the remnants of 4 DORSETS, in the area of HOENHOT.

Enemy armour (10 SS Panzer Division) were thought to be east of the railway line NIGMEGEN – ARNHEM.

29 September No change. 1st Troop destroy enemy OP north of the river with 17 pdr. Sergeant Rattle engages enemy crossing the railway line after dark! The reason for the presence of a Troop in this location seemed to be to raise the morale of the Infantry and, more possibly, to assist them to repulse a possible attack by enemy Infantry from east of the railway line after a severe 'stonking'. There was no threat from enemy armour over the steep railway embankment, leading to the railway bridge over the R RHINE. The tanks were within a few yards of the embankment, aiming along it.

Corporal Murrell met with an accident and was evacuated to the CCS, for a few stitches to his head.

30th September No change. Latrineograms state that we are likely to be on the move to the south of the British Army flank, towards KOLN. The Squadron Leader decided that when he visited his troops it was prudent to do so on foot. To do so in a Scout Car only resulted in a 'stonking' by the enemy as he entered each village. This was not popular with the Infantry in whose area the Troops were located. Whilst on such a mission to 1st Troop in DRIEL he was walking along the road when an enemy FW109 fighter aircraft flew past him at a very low level. He had seen the aircraft approaching him and had drawn his revolver from his battledress blouse. As it passed him, only about 20 yards away, he fired at it. To his surprise, he saw the aircraft land east of the railway line. When he returned to Squadron HQ he heard that the pilot had been taken prisoner by C Squadron into whose sector he had walked. He had been wounded by a bullet which had only grazed his forehead. However, air battles over the Bridgehead area were not infrequent.

1 October At 10.00 hrs an attack came in, over the railway line upon the 1st Troop area at DRIEL (5 DORSETS). It was beaten off. Presumably the MGs of the tanks firing along the embankment was a deterrent!

2 October Heavy 'stonking' of 3rd Troop area south of DRIEL during the morning. Lieutenant Townsend Green's tank was hit by a shell. He was slightly wounded and went to the RAP of the 4 WILTS (who had relieved the 5 WILTS) which was in a cellar. Shortly after his arrival the concussion of a direct hit on the building killed him. He had only been with the Squadron since 2nd September when he had taken over the Troop after Lieutenant Jennison had accidentally been killed.

In the afternoon Lieutenant Garlick, who had returned from the Squadron, having recovered from his wounds, took over the Troop. He went forward in SQMS Rodwell's tank, which resulted in a further 'stonk'. It might be appropriate here to explain why I think that the tank used to replace the damaged troop leaders tank was that of 'SQMS' Rodwell.

Before D Day 'our' Sergeant Marke had made a 'clairvoyant' prediction that the Sergeants of the Squadron would, 'in the main', survive the campaign in Europe. To date, his prediction had been correct and where as 4 Officers of the Squadron had been killed and two others had been wounded no members of the Squadron's Sergeant's Mess had become casualties. Their first casualty was not until Sergeant Hepper MM was killed on the 24 February 1945. Their only other casualty was Sergeant Rattle who lost a finger on the 6th March 1945.

The other Squadrons had suffered several casualties amongst their senior NCOs, creating vacancies on the Regimental Promotion Role. However, Sergeants of the Squadron preferred survival to promotion. Sergeant Rodwell had, exceptionally, been promoted but was still a Troop Sergeant, temporarily, until his tank was taken away from him!

4,000 Bombers passed overhead, on their way to the RHUR.

8 October Lieutenant Colonel Dunkerley left the Regiment. To the great regret of everyone, due to his paralysed arm becoming quite useless. He had commanded the Regiment since Lieutenant Colonel Harrap was killed in the ORNE Bridgehead, except for a short period of command by The Earl of Faversham, who now took over from him.

Major Ruggie Price became Regimental 2I/C. Captain Stancomb left us to take over command of B Squadron and Captain Walker joined the Squadron from C Squadron as 2I/C.

INTERLUDE FROM THE ISLAND

9 October The Squadron to move to the eastern sector of the NIGMEGEN front about 3 miles south of the town held by the US 82nd Airborne Division, supported by the Armoured GRENADIER GUARDS: mainly in an anti-tank role. Squadron Leader went on a general reconnaissance of the area.

10 October Squadron Leader went to liaise with the GRENADIERS in the Factory area, to the south of MALDEN. Captain Walker went to recce a temporary harbour area at DEKKERSWALD. Captain DENNY brought the Squadron, leaving WEURT at 13.00 hrs and arriving in the temporary harbour at 14.30 hrs whence they left for the forward positions at 18.30 hrs, arriving there at about 20.00 hrs.

We are now under command of the 82nd US AB Division with 4th Troop in the Factory area, 2nd Troop also in a forward position on their left with HQ, 1st and 3rd Troops in reserve. The GRENADIERS had dug excellent tank positions.

11 October Fields in front of Squadron HQ found to be growing a very fine crop of mushrooms. A welcome addition to compo rations.

In the afternoon, heavy rain. Captain Taylor, the Squadron's Forward Observing Officer of the ESSEX YEOMANRY (8th Armoured Brigade's Gunner Regiment) decided that the 82nd's Defensive Fire Tasks were very intricate and, in his opinion, would be largely ineffective.

12 October At 09.00 hrs the CO accompanied by Major Gosling, the Battery Commander of the ESSEX YEOMANRY in support of the Regiment, arrived and inspected 4th Troop's position in the Factory area with the Squadron Leader and Captain Taylor. As the result of this the 'DF' tasks were simplified and reduced to two. Lieutenant Watt, commanding 4th Troop, reported that the area provided a goodly supply of vegetables and live stock. Later, 'stonking' of the area and that of 2nd Troop took place on a spasmodic basis.

13 October The Squadron was relieved on the night 13/14 by B Squadron. The Squadron moved to BRAKKENSTEIN, west of NIGMEGEN. The move/handover took place after dark. The move was delayed by one Troop of B Squadron becoming bogged on its way to relieve 4th Troop in the Factory area. The Squadron left the area, less the Squadron Leader and 4th Troop, at 22.00 hrs and arrived at their destination at 01.00 hrs. However, on the way Captain Taylor's (ESSEX YEO) tank knocked down and endeavoured to fall over the parapet of a bridge. It was closely followed by Sergeant Hepper's tank. Both tanks finished up on their bellies, overhanging the railway 30 feet below. This blocked the bridge so that the remainder of the Squadron had to make a diversion via NIGMEGEN and MOOK. The Squadron Leader and 4th Troop were also having a problem!

(My memory in 1990, which is faulty, is that the incident related here took place somewhat later when we were supporting the 3rd Canadian Division, who were holding the front in the flooded 'ploder' country south of the Neder RHEIN, east of ARNHEM.) However, this was the situation and the problem. Due to the waterlogged nature of the ground, 4th Troop's location was now only accessible via the flood bank of the river, which was in full view of the enemy holding the far bank. Movement along the 'bund' could only be undertaken under cover of darkness and silently. That is to say, at walking pace. Therefore, Lieutenant Alistair Watt, the Troop Leader, was walking in front of his tank. In order to get off the 'bund' the tanks had to descend a very narrow and steep incline. At this point Alistair was walking backwards. I was at the bottom of the ramp, waiting for the Troop. Suddenly Alistair disappeared into the ground and in a muffled and spluttering voice, was heard to call for "Help". On investigation, it was seen that he had fallen into an open cesspit, in which he was endeavouring to swim/paddle in order to avoid drowning. There was no way in which he could extract himself from this predicament; a rope was required. The only rope available was the tow-rope on his tank. This was removed from its stowage position as quickly as possible, by his crew. One end was lowered to Alistair and the other attached to his tank which then slowly extracted him from his rather nasty 'deathbed'! I then instructed him to risk the possibility of drawing the enemy's attention to himself and to proceed over the 'bund', to take his clothes off, throw them in the river, and to go for a swim. This I think he did and after which, still 'ponging' a bit, he resumed his duties as Troop Leader. We then followed the remainder of the Squadron to BRAKKENSTEIN where we arrived at about 01.00 hrs. (There is no doubt that Alistair would remember the exact details and location of the incident better than I do!)

14 October The Squadron Officers and Sergeants were accommodated in a Convent Hospital. The Troops in a school at the rear of it. Maintenance and cleaning (including Lt Watt) took place.

15 October Track plates welded onto the turrets and front of all tanks, to provide additional protection; particularly against bazookas (spaced armour). C of E service conducted by the Rev Green in the cinema adjoining the school at 11.00 hrs. Billets for all were found to be very satisfactory. The nuns were very kind and did everything to make us comfortable. Also, cinema show during the day.

16 October Squadron Leader and Captain Denny attended a lecture by the Corps Commander, Lt Gen Brian Horrocks (30 Corps). Brigade Workshops inspected the tanks. Inoculations in the afternoon. Regimental 'snooker' in the school in the evening. At 23.30 hrs unexpected orders received to move back to the 'island'.

The ISLAND Revisited

17 October Squadron Leader went to liaise with the GREYS, in the area of HERVELD, about seven miles west of the NIGMEGEN bridges and two miles north of the R MASS – four miles south of the NEDER RHEIN. Captain Walker carried out a reconnaissance for a temporary harbour in the same area. Captain Denny brought the Squadron forward.

Major Cordy-Simpson was in temporary command of the Regiment. Crossed the NIGMEGEN Bridge at 16.00 hrs and arrived in HERVELD area an hour later. GREYS moved out at night and we took over their positions.

18 October We are now under command of the 101 US Airborne Division, who are protecting the west flank of the Bridgehead. C Squadron is 'up front'. A Squadron is in support of 501 and 506 Combat Teams. B Squadron is in support of 50 Northumbrian Division, who are holding the east flank of the Bridgehead. Liaison with the Combat Teams for Counter Attack roles undertaken. It rained very heavily. Captain Denny tried out a new twin zip fronted tank suit and reported that it was warm and waterproof.

19 October Squadron Leader reviews Counter Attack roles with the Commander of 506 Combat Team. In the afternoon Captain Denny went, at the request of 501 Combat Team Commander, to lay on shooting tasks for the morning, against Ops north of the N RHEIN.

20 October Squadron Leader and Captain Denny went with the tanks of 4th Troops to positions on the 'bund' of the N RHEIN west of HETAREN to engage two church spires in the area of WENNINGEN, about 3,000 yards north of our firing positions. Opened fire at 10.15 hrs and ceased seven minutes later. 25 hits were observed on the larger of the two spires and five on the smaller one. There was no reverse stonking. SRY reconnaissance party arrived at 12.00 hrs.

21 October At 10.00 hrs 1st and 3rd Troops went to the 'bund' and fired for 25 minutes on targets north of the river, indicated to them by 501 Combat Team Commanders, after which they returned to our harbour area.

NOTE

The diary states that:

"From now on it is intended to give a rough outline of the activities of A Squadron as the campaign has entered a different phase. Days of 'swaning' are over and the idea of a victory before the winter is out of our minds.

We are now looking forward to an early victory in 1945. We expect to be out of the line of refit, retrain and reorganise."

We obviously left the island on 21st October for the next entry is on the 8th November.

The Regimental History devoted two paragraphs to this period thus. "October the 21st to November the 8th was spent between WINNSEN and MOLENHOEK with parties taking turns in the rest camp at LOUVAIN and ANTWERP. A Brigade concert party was formed in which several men of the Regiment took part, and football and other recreations were extensively employed.

Balaclava Day was celebrated at WINNSEN in the traditional manner with the Officers' and Sergeants' hockey match and a dance held in NIGMEGEN, attended by some 300 Dutch girls who danced for the first time since 1940."

INTO GERMANY

8 November 8th Armoured Brigade is moving to the area of GEILENKIRCHEN where 30 Corps will take over from 9th American Army and attack towards the R ROER. 30 Corps will consist of 43 Division, Guards Armoured Division and 8th Armoured Brigade. Leave BISSETT, south of

GROESBEEK, some 5 miles SE of NIGMEGAN, and move on our tracks a distance of about 20 miles via the MOOK bridge to GRAVE where we load onto transporters. They took us about 50 miles via RINDHOVEN to PEEL. We arrived at the unloading point at about 7 pm. Had difficulty in keeping the transporter drivers awake. We were on the road for 17 hours. No guides to meet us – we therefore pull off the road and harbour for the night. The weather is bloody cold, snowing and blowing. During the night we received orders to move at 08.00 hrs to SITTARD, a distance of 14 miles.

9 November Move as ordered, Met guide, Captain Jury (Regimental Intelligence Officer) in SITTARD. Rather a poor place. Given order to move to BRUNSUM, still in HOLLAND, and billet ourselves in civilian houses. Baths in the local Colliery. Squadron Leaders conference at the HQ of 129 Brigade (43 Div). Taking over the front line between SITTARD and GEILENKIRCHEN from the Americans.

10 November Squadron remains in Brunsum and seem to enjoy it. Americans open cinema and quite a lot of friendships made. Squadron Leader carries out a reconnaissance of STAHE area, 2 miles east of GANGELT on the SITTARD-GEILENKIRCHEN road.

The line has been stable for about 6 weeks; but it is in GERMANY. Civilian population seem disinterested and continue to work in the fields. All peasant type.

11 November Move to STAHE in support of the 5 WILTS who hold the villages of BIRGDEN and HASTENRATH. Attack on GEILENKIRCHEN to be carried out from the SE by one US Division, under command of 30 Corps, supported by the SRY and by 43 Division from the SW. The Squadron to support the attack by long distant HE 'shoot'.

12 – 25 November Squadron remains in STAHE. Civilians evacuated but cellar accommodation is limited and only two Troops are underground. On the 18th 43 Division attacked GEILENKIRCHEN. The attack went according to plan and was successful, for a change. The Squadron gave indirect fire support to B Squadron attacking BAUCHEM, about a mile west of G'KIRCHEN on the STAHE road.

For this support operation ten 75 mm gun tanks fired 2,000 rounds in three hours at a range of 6,600 yards. The Squadron Leader acted as Forward Observing Officer (FOO); but visibility was difficult due to smoke rising from the target area. The result was, however, satisfactory in that B Squadron, with 5 DORSETS captured the objective without opposition and took 150 prisoners.

The Division's next objectives are the villages of STRAETEN and WALDENRATH on the west side of the road leading north from G'KIRCHEN to HEINSBERG.

The planning difficulties of this operation are that we do not know the areas which have been mined by the Americans, and of course, the boggy nature of the ground. A Squadron is to support the 7 HAMPSHIREs. Our objective is to be WALDNERATH, after 5 DORSETS have a foothold in STRAETEN which is about 1,000 yards to the east. One Troop of the LOTHIAN and BORDER HORSE (Flail – mine clearance tanks) will be under our command.

The weather is bloody – it rains every day and the ground becomes more and more impassable to tanks.

Extension 'Track Connectors', (plates about 5 inches long) are becoming available. The tanks tracks have to be taken off and each Connector is then bolted onto the outer end track pins. A tedious task; but they do improve the cross country capability of the tanks.

On 20th November the Regiment called for our Troop, whose tanks have been fitted with the End Connectors, to be placed under command of B Squadron who were to support the 4 and 5 DORSETS in an attack to clear the woods west of the G'KIRCHEN – HEINSBERG road. Since only one tank in each Troop had End Connectors fitted it was necessary to send a composite

Troop which consisted of Lieutenants Watt and Booth, Sergeant Hammond and Corporal Davies. They reported to B Squadron at 07.00 hrs and found that all of the Squadron's tanks were bogged-down. It was therefore decided that they should support the right Battalion carrying out the attack by themselves. The Battalion was the 4 DORSETS. They did this very adequately and destroyed many enemy defensive positions. They had to remain in the wood, which was the objective, for the night because the Battalion could not get their anti-tank guns forward to their captured position.

During our stay in STAHE we had two lucky escapes when enemy shells exploded in the doorways of the billets of Squadron HQ and 2nd Troop. These caused no casualties but forced us to spend more time in the cellars.

Defensive positions, in depth, were roughly bulldozed and then completed by the crews themselves, for all tanks, making it potentially a strong defensive position. One of the snags to manoeuvre was that we still did not know the layout of anti-tank minefields which had been laid by the Americans.

25 November – 3 December At HOCHIDE – A village about two miles north of G'KIRCHEN. The Squadron moved to this village in a counter attack role in support of the 4 WILTS. The terrain was still so wet that cross country movement by our tanks was impossible. This meant that we could not get to the locations of the forward Companies which were holding the woods at HOVEN. We relieved A Squadron of the 4/7 DGs, and expected to stay in this location for 4 or 5 days.

Sergeant Gammon was wounded in the leg when, presumably, he was dismounted and directing his tank into its position on arrival in the village. His tank had been a casualty on the beach on D Day, when he had been a Corporal and he was not therefore covered by Sergeant Marke's D Day prediction concerning casualties to the Sergeants Mess members!

1st Troop were located at the north of the village (Lt Knowles) whilst 3rd Troop (Lt Garlick) was at the southern end, covering the valley between us and the American Division on our right.

Tactical Squadron HQ (Sqn Ldr and Capt Taylor, the FOO from the Essex Yeomanry) were in a barn on the NE corner of the village from the roof of which good observation was available to the north and east of the village.

Captains Denny and Walker (rear SHQ) and the other two Troops were located in the northern outskirts of G'KIRCHEN.

Daytime movement on tanks in this area was restricted, because the area was under observation from enemy OPs. Another complication was that the American defence was very fluid, in that one day they would be in a village across the valley and on the next day they might have withdrawn from it – only to return to it the following night.

On the first morning that we were there, there was a 'flap' threatened. 3rd Troop took up their defensive positions before first light; but nothing happened. They withdrew at dusk. Also during that afternoon our forward area was 'stonked'. The Squadron Leader sought and got permission to engage the village of UTTERATH, which he thought housed the enemy's OPs. This request was granted and an indirect shoot was carried out by the rear two Troops. About 800 rounds were fired which caused three fires in the target area and the church tower to collapse. This seemed to irritate the opposition who then spent several days trying to knock down the church tower in the village of TIPS RATH, about ½ mile to our left. They also engaged this village with volleys of Nebelwerfers about three times each day. It was a pretty unhealthy location!

The Squadron undertook two further indirect shoots whilst we were there. The first on the 27th, when we were called upon to occupy the attention of the enemy in two villages (UTTERATH and BRUM) whilst a counter attack was being made by a Troop of C Squadron and a Company of Infantry in TRIPS RATH where elements of 10th SS Panzer Division had reoccupied part of the village. This counter attack was successful and about 60 PsOW were taken with few casualties to

our Infantry. However, one of our shells during the 'ranging' operation hit a house behind Squadron HQ which was occupied by our Battalion's Mortar Platoon. Fortunately they suffered no casualties. On immediate investigation it was admitted that Lieutenant Hunt's crew had not put any elevation on their gun. This was rectified for the next 'ranging' round.

The procedure for an indirect shoot by the rear half Squadron and the 'laying' of the guns was somewhat crude. Having selected the tank positions, away from the harbour area, on level ground the tanks would drive into line and ammunition would be dumped behind them. The elevation and traversing handwheels were marked into sections. All guns would be aimed at a distant object in the general direction of the target and then levelled by means of placing a spirit level on the breech block (Quadrant – supplied with the tank kit). A ranging gun would traverse to the direction of the target and fire a ranging round beyond the target.

The Forward Observer would correct the gun by ordering alterations in handwheels (up or down and left or right or many turns or sections) until the target was being hit. The ranging tanks Commander would then check the handwheel turns and sections to the distant reference point and then those to the gun level position. These figures were then applied to all the guns participating in the shoot. Each tank could then be ordered to fire one round, to check that they were hitting the target area. (In the case of Lieutenant Hunt this was found not to be the case.)

The Forward Observer (Sqn Ldr or Captain Taylor) could spread the impact areas by ordering a collective variation of the handwheel positions. Captain Taylor was also able to call upon the 30 Corps Artillery to engage any observed enemy activity and any suspected gun or mortar positions (Victor Targets).

Our stay in HOCHIDE was somewhat prolonged, due to the difficulty of movement in the area. During our stay there were four Infantry Battalion reliefs. They, poor people, could not dig slit trenches because they filled up with water and, therefore, they had to build mud castles, to provide some protection against Artillery and mortar fire. Rear Squadron HQ came under heavy Artillery fire on several occasions.. One 17 pr tank was hit and damaged, without personnel casualties. At this time planning was taking place for Operation SHEARS. The aim of this operation was to clear the enemy from the territory between the R MASS and R ROER astride the road from G'KIRCHEN to HEINSBERG, a distance of about 10 miles to the north of G'KIRCHEN. The attack was to be undertaken by 52 (Lowland) Scottish Division supported by 8th Armoured Brigade.

13/18th R Hussars were to be leading Regiment with a Battalion of 52 (L) Division in Kangeroos. (Sherman tank hulls, converted into APCs). A Squadron were to lead after the initial break out by B Squadron. On the 3rd December we were relieved by 34 Armoured Brigade.

3 – 20 December The Regiment were out of the line at ULLESTRATEN back in Holland. Not a very exciting place as it was only a small country village with very few amenities. However, many of the chaps made friends with the civilian population and really quite enjoyed their stay there. Initially, much of the time was spent fitting track extensions and planning for Operation SHEARS. This operation was eventually dropped owing to the impossible 'going' which showed no signs of improving.

Three different exercises were held at VALKERTSWAARD, some 14 miles from ULLESTRATEN with the Brigade Command of 52 (L) Division. We were to have operated with 6 Camerons of 156 Brigade. We held our preliminary discussions and made our plans. However, the weather did not improve and this Brigade was sent into the line. This procedure took place with each Brigade in the Division until finally the operation was shelved.

Leave to BRUSSELS continued during this time and the draw for the first parties of English leave was made. Fortunately, for all, Sgt Rattle was drawn out amongst the first eight; considerable peace for a few days. Trooper Maxwell went first. Only three Officers were eligible – ie Major Wormald, Captain Denny and Lieutenant Knowles. Lieutenant Spencer rejoined the Squadron at

HOCHIDE from England. He seemed to have recovered completely from his Spandau wound, inflicted when hunting in Normandy.

Towards the end of our stay the weather became decidedly colder and it began to freeze.

The German offensive in the Ardennes caused a slight stir when we were about to move to EINDHOVEN to begin training for the spring offensive. We were to work with 43 Division in 30 Corps. The advance parties had departed and billeting was arranged. The offensive came as a surprise to all of us as our "I" reports seem to indicate that such an offensive was impossible and also we had been told that one of the effects of Operation Shears was to prevent the enemy pulling out his formations to re-equip them for their spring offensive!

The Regiment was given the task of defending MASSTRICHT. 8 Armoured Brigade coming under command 12 Corps. Not much could be done beyond reconnoitring defensive positions. It seemed quite probable that the drive in the south would be accompanied by a pincer from the north, in the SITTARD area, in order to cut off 9 US Army.

On the 20th December we were told to relieve the Guards Armoured Division in the GANGELT-GILLRATH sector. The Guards were to be taken back to TURNHOUT (20 miles NE of ANTWERP) in case the Germans broke across the R MASS and attacked towards BRUSSELS. Further, threat by Airborne Troops was reported to be directed at ANTWERP and BRUSSELS. Certain small bodies of parachutists were dropped in 8 Armoured Brigade area which caused us to have to stand-to at 07.00 – 08.00 hrs and 17.30 – 18.30 hrs daily.

20 – 27 December On 20 December we took over from A Sqn 1 Armd Grenadiers in GANGELT (5 miles NW of G'KIRCHEN) with two Troops out with the forward companies in VINTELEN and HASTENRATH. Neither of these villages was very defensible, both being on open forward slopes which were not capable of being supported from any other area. Reconnaissance was difficult as it was very foggy but the fog enabled us to have a daylight take over. The forward troops were 2nd in VINTELEN and 4th in HASTENRATH. These troops were relieved by 3rd and 1st on the 23rd and 24th respectively. In HASTENRATH enemy patrols entered the village on the first two nights but did not disturb the tanks.

In GANGELT the defence problem was difficult as the Battalion only had in all 5 Pls with which to defend the town. The Squadron were, therefore, made responsible for the eastern and northern approaches during the hours of darkness and the A/Tk defence of all areas during daylight. Two bulldozers were asked for and by the 23rd every tank had a dug-in position. In fact, the area was made reasonably strong by day.

It was, however, considered that the enemy Infantry could easily enter the town under cover of darkness. Troops were in separate locations, in and outside the town, without any Infantry protection. Squadron HQ was located with 4th Troop on the eastern outskirts of the town, on the road to HANDEPATH (?). At night the Troops manned ground mounted Browning MGs in slit trenches near or under their tanks and, in addition, they manned the turret of a Guard Tank, the gun of which was loaded with an HE round and aimed at a point on the ground about thirty yards away, on the most likely axis of approach by the enemy.

In the SHQ/4th Troop's location the Squadron Leader at night armed nightfall booby traps which he had laid on the light railway which led into their position. He had agreed with the Battalion Commander that no person or vehicle should enter the Troop's locations between 19.00 hrs and 06.30 hrs. These precautions were rewarded early on the morning of the 24th when an enemy patrol (?) literally marched into SHQ/4th Troop's position. The Guard Tanks Browning and main armament were fired. This alerted and alarmed our slumbering Officers and soldiers, who 'stood-to'. However, the enemy withdrew leaving one dead and two wounded soldiers. L/Cpl Fraser was the duty gunner.

Anti-tank minefields were laid in front of the Squadron's 'reserve slope' dug-in positions. Hopefully, had the enemy attacked us with armour, their tanks would have been halted in the minefields and become 'hull-up' sitting targets to our own 'dug-in' machines. Later it was learned that zero hour for a large scale attack on our sector of the front by 5th Panzer Army was to have been at dawn on the 23rd. However, this Army was diverted to reinforce the successful attack in the ARDENNES and our defences were never tested!

27 December – 10 January On the 27th we were relieved in GANGELT by the SHERWOOD RANGERS YEOMANRY. The handover was completed by 20.00 hrs and the Squadron moved back by Troops to SCHINNEN, in HOLLAND, which was about 8 miles SW from GANGELT and 5 miles south of SITTARD, in a counter attack role. The weather was decidedly cold, with some 30 degrees of frost. Reconnaissances of the area were carried out by Crew Commanders and again we obtained the services of two bulldozers to help us create 'dug-in' positions for our tanks. Christmas Day activities were celebrated on New Years Day. We were now under command of 12 Corps. Our new Corps Commander (General Ritchie) visited the Regiment. 30 Corps Commander (General Horrocks) had been moved south and west to deal with the break through in the ARDENNES and the threat to our Ls of C through BRUSSELS.

The scale of 17 pdr tanks per troop was increased to two; but not yet available, and the establishment of a Squadron was increased to 20 at four per Troop. This the Squadron always had attempted to have unofficially.

10 January Move forward about 5 miles to the SCHINVELT area, still in Holland, but in support of 52 (Lowland) Division who were holding the GANGELT sector. Not much comfort and overcrowded.

11 January A Warning Order was received that we may be employed in an operation of the SHEARS type to clear the opposition from the territory between the Rivers Mass (Meuse) and Roer.

12 January Relieved by the 6 Armoured Brigade (GUARDS Armoured Division). Move back to ULLESTRATTEN, about half way between MAASTERICHT and SITTARD and come under command of 7th Armoured Division.

13 – 18 January Remain in ULLEESTRATTEN waiting to be committed in Operation BLACKCOCK. Ex SHEARS: from the west rather than the south.

The Regiment's task was to advance into Germany from SUSTEREN and ECHT, 5 – 8 miles north of SITTARD, towards WALDEFEUCHT and on to HEINSBERG.

The Regimental Plan was for A Squadron to lead the advance with a Company of 5/7 ROYAL SCOTS followed by RHQ and B Squadron. C Squadron Group was to provide left flank protection to the column. The Squadron Plan was to endeavour to 'bunch' the bridge over the PEPPINS BEEK, about half way between SUSTEREM and WALDEFEUGHT (if held by the enemy). Then advance through the wooded country by night with the aid of 'Artificial Moonlight' (AA searchlights shining on the sky) and to enter WALDEFEUGHT before dawn. This was not to be.

19 January Just after midnight on the morning of the 19th the Squadron Leader attended an O Group at the HQ of 8th Armoured Brigade in SITTARD. The Regiment was ordered to move immediately to carry out their task. The information about the enemy was very scanty. They might be holding the PEPPINS BEEK and they might still be to the west of it; the Squadron moved at 02.00 hrs and arrived in SITTARD at about 04.00 hrs. Movement was slow, partly because of the ice on the road upon which the track of the tanks tended to act as skates unless movement was slow. Regimental O Group was held in a shed on the roadside. The plan and order of march were as already ordered. Once we turned east at SUSTEREN the minor road along which we were to advance was raised above the surrounding countryside and edged by deep ditches.

Remembering what had happened to the tanks of the Guards Armoured Division in similar conditions the Squadron Leader arranged, through Captain Taylor, that Artillery smoke should be readily available to be fired on our flanks. However at the start of the move to the east, just before first light, it was snowing heavily and visibility was down to a few yards, smoke was unnecessary. In addition, the Squadron Leader ordered that 75mm guns should be loaded with smoke and traversed to alternate flanks within the column and aimed at about 200 yards from the road.

As the column approached the PEPPINS BEEK (the name of the river is uncertain) the snow suddenly stopped and the visibility increased to several hundred yards and with this came the familiar 'crack' of AP shots. At first it was not known from which flank they had been fired; but the Squadron Leader saw a 'short' strike on the ground to his left and ordered 'fire smoke left'. At the same time Captain Taylor called for the Artillery smoke to be fired but before this could be effective, nine shots had been fired by the enemy. Three tanks of 3rd Troop, just behind Squadron HQ in the column, were hit. Trooper Barnard was killed and Lieutenant Garlick wounded, again. The crews 'bailed out' (and the survivors went back to pick up some new tanks from the REP). The smoke was effective and no further shots were fired at us. The column ahead of 3rd Troop continued their advance, in some haste, to the shelter of the woods beyond the river (PEPPINS BEEK?), the bridge over which was, surprisingly, not held by the enemy. Behind the 3rd Troop 'road block' were two Troops of the Squadron, the Company of the Royal SCOTS in Kangeroos, a Troop of AVsRE and a Troop of Flails. Also, of course, the rest of the Regimental column. 1st Troop, immediately behind the road block, were ordered to 'fill in' the ditch on the right of the road with logs (from whence I know not) and to bypass the obstruction. This they did and were followed by the other Troop, the Infantry and the AVsRE. However the Flails, with their extra weight of the Flail 'up front' on the tanks, became bogged down; recreating the blockage to the axis.

The Regimental column then withdrew to SUSTEREN. (Next day they moved to KONINGSBOSCH, which had been captured by another column supported by the 4/7 DG. KONINGSBOSCH was about 3 miles SW of WALDEFEUGHT). The blizzard started again and Artillery smoke was stopped. The Squadron Leader went back to the 'road block' to see whether he could clear it by laying additional logs or by towing or pushing the 'wrecks' sufficiently to 'open' the road. He attached his tank by his tow rope to the leading tank and started to tow; but the tracks of the 'brew-up' became jammed. The blizzard suddenly stopped and visibility cleared. There was, again the familiar 'crack' of AP shots, which were being fired at the little group of 4 live (3 flails) and 3 dead tanks on the axis. The Squadron Leader immediately fired his smoke to screen himself from the enemy, the actual location of whom he did not know. He only had five rounds left and these were not very effective, because the smoke buried themselves in the wet ground. He called for Artillery which, fortunately for him, came down quickly and was effective. He unhitched himself from the 'brew-up' and scuttled for the cover of the woods. He did not repeat his effort to clear the axis.

At this point, possibly, it should be explained that the 'familiar crack' of AP shots could be heard because when in close contact with the enemy our Tank Commanders would usually keep the top of their heads above the rim of the commander's turret hatch with only one radio earphone in place (sometimes one felt that they had both earphones displaced!). In this condition they could hear the distinctive 'crack' of AP shot, hopefully, passing them by, and they would be able to take some immediate defensive action.

The 'head out' position also gave them better all-round visibility and with the hatch open 'bailing out' from a 'brew-up' was a possibility. In a 'closed-down' tank they would not have known that they were under attack from enemy AP or other fire until it could be 'too late' and bailing out was likely to be impossible!

During the afternoon the Squadron Group were joined by two Companies of the KOSB and B Company of the 12/60 KRRC (our Motor Battalion). The KOSB had picked up about 40 enemy during their advance, without resistance. Later the remainder of the Battalion arrived and advanced, under Artificial Moonlight, towards KONINGSBOGCH, a village about two miles SW of WALDEFEUCHT.

The Squadron leagured for the night in close 'herring-bone' formation. Late in the evening on a very cold night, when the crews settled down in their pits under their tanks, the Squadron Leader heard a voice saying 'Hello Derrick, are you there'. The voice was, unmistakably, that of the Commanding Officer; Lt Col The Earl of Feversham. Apparently the rear link between Squadron HQ and Regimental HQ was not working properly and so the CO had decided to visit this leading Squadron alone on foot, all the way from SUSTEREN, a distance of about 5 miles. He was quite exhausted and very overheated. Space was made for him under the Squadron Leader's tank and he was given a strong whisky. He was wearing a long white German army sheepskin coat, which had been acquired from a German depot in NIGMEGEN. When he was settled he said 'Derrick, I have just had a very nasty experience'. He then told us that whilst walking along the axis from SUSTEREN he had been joined by a column of Infantry coming in from the right of the track. He was about to say to one of them 'My boy, where are you going' when he noticed that they were wearing German steel helmets. He refrained from making the comment and walked on with them. After a short distance they turned off the track to the left. He had to make a quick decision as to whether to go with them, into captivity, or to continue on his lonely journey, and possibly be challenged and shot in the back. Not wishing to walk into captivity he decided upon the latter course of action. This was the cause of his distressful condition. He spent the night under our tank and returned to RHQ (the ROYAL MEWS, as it was called) the next morning.

The weather that night was bloody, with 37 degrees of frost and a blizzard blowing.

20 and 21 January The Squadron remained in the Bridgehead with the Company of the 5/7 Royal Scots.

During the 19th and the 20th C Squadron on our left flank had encountered the anti-tank defences which had engaged us on the 19th. A brief account of their activities during these two days is recorded in the Regimental history.

"Meanwhile C Squadron on their front ran into stiff resistance shortly after passing the start line on the 19th and lost five tanks from concealed 88mm guns. Sergeant Driver was killed, but not before he knocked out on SP and one tank: Sergeant Miller claimed one SP and Sergeant Smith another. Trooper Mason was killed and Lieutenant E Smith and three other ranks wounded. At last light the battle was broken off and the Squadron rallied, but found the road cut by the enemy behind them. They had, however, five days rations on the tanks so shared them with their Infantry who had nothing at all. They spent a bitterly cold and uncomfortable night together.

On the following morning the Squadron was placed under command of the 7th/9th Royal Scots Fusiliers and ordered to continue the advance. Very little progress was made before they were again held up by well concealed 88mms and SPs. Major Cotter's tank was hit and 'brewed' up, Sergeant Bradley and Trooper Reed being killed; Major Cotter himself was untouched. A little later two more tanks were hit but no casualties were incurred. It was quite impossible to get on any further as the country was very open and completely commanded by anti-tank defences."

In fact, the 5th KOSB, 52 (L) Division, captured WALDEFEUCHT on the 20th with few casualties.

B Squadron was moved from SUSTEREN via SITTARD to KONINGSBOSCH on the 20th and were ordered to support the KOSB in WALDEFEUCHT that night. They entered the town just before midnight, just as a German counterattack was being launched.

Here, again, I think that it is worth recording the action of B Squadron on the 21st February, as recorded in the Regimental history.

B Squadron, led by Major Stancomb, left the village of KONINGSBOSCH one and a half miles away, where it had spent half the night. We all thought we were on a normal, rather dull, supporting operation. The ground was three inches deep in freshly fallen snow and the Squadron advanced across open country in almost complete darkness. Captain Neave, 2I/C of the

Squadron, had lost this tank during the night to a very unlucky direct hit from a distant gun. Approximately halfway we ran into heavy 'stonk' from mortars, guns and SPs firing solid shot from our left flank. The different tank troops, who were to join Infantry companies in separate quarters of the town, now split up and began their several tasks in the dark. Lieutenant Moulding, 2nd Troop Leader, ran his tank over a complete box of Hawkins anti-tank grenades and became immobile. His remaining two tanks were ordered to join the 3rd and 4th Troops. From this point onwards it will be easier to describe the individual troop actions. Lieutenant Aitchison and the 1st Troop went to the western end of the village. As his troop was moving into position, three enemy Tiger tanks loomed up out of the mist about one hundred yards away. Two of them were immediately hit by the Infantry 6-pounder anti-tank guns and 'brewed up', but Lieutenant Aitchison's tank and two more of his troop received hits and were destroyed. Lieutenant Aitchison returned to Squadron Headquarters on foot, only consoled by the sight of his enemy destroyed at fifty yards range.

"A third Tiger was hit, and yet another shortly afterwards by the Infantry 6-pounder anti-tank guns and Corporal Weston's tank.

"The 3rd Troop under Lieutenant Franks went into the town square and then turning south east attempted to take up its positions. Here a dramatic event occurred. The enemy Infantry had infiltrated into the surrounding houses and were at close quarters with our own troops. Two Tiger tanks were supporting them and, after a very bitter battle, a tank of the 3rd Troop was destroyed by a direct hit from one of them. The remaining Shermans were knocked out by German Infantry firing 'Panzer-fausts' from the top floors of the houses. The survivors of the troop had a very hard time finding their way back to our own lines, some being taken prisoner by the Boche.

"The 4th Troop under Lieutenant Denny also went into the square and turned north east holding the perimeter of the square. The situation here was no better and, during the morning, became considerably worse. The enemy was trying desperately to recapture WALDEFEUCHT and, at 9 am, their main attack was put in. This was from the north and east so that the 4th Troop found themselves very heavily engaged. The enemy infiltrated through the houses and eventually surrounded the square. They attempted to get a Tiger tank into the square, but it was unable to get through the narrow streets. Casualties were inflicted on both sides and the fighting was bitter and furious. The enemy knocked out two of our tanks with 'Panzerfausts' and damaged a third while snipers killed one crew commander who had fought very bravely. The position became so untenable that the Squadron Leader decided that the two remaining tanks should run the gauntlet rather than be swamped by the enemy Infantry. The climax came with a dash back through the town to our own lines. With guns blazing and an incredible amount of smoke and noise, the two tanks tore through the town amid a hail of enemy small arms fire and hastily fired 'Panzerfausts'. Luck was with them and they reached their new positions without further loss.

"By approximately midday the enemy had crept forward through three quarters of the town, and were trying hard to throw us out of the last quarter. But it was of no avail. With Squadron HQ Troop as the centre, the remaining tanks of the Squadron rallied round and kept the enemy at bay. By evening, the enemy realised they had lost and began to withdraw. By midnight, the situation was restored, and, although we were shelled throughout the night, we were not again attacked.

"It is fitting to end this article with a few words of praise for Squadron HQ. Throughout the whole of the battle Major Stancomb, assisted by Captain Neave, directed the Squadron magnificently in most trying circumstances, and it was largely due to them that we held out until reinforcements made it possible for us to clear the town."

22 January Moved to relieve B Squadron in WALDEFEUCHT. As no information concerning the enemy was available and as the Squadron Leader was suspicious that there might still be some enemy tanks or SP anti-tank guns lingering in the area, he decided to move the Squadron to the town under cover of darkness. The town was reached without incident. However, whilst taking up our defensive positions around the town Captain Taylor, Essex Yeomanry, excitedly came on the air and reported 'Enemy contact – I have collided with a Tiger (tank) at the crossroads behind you – Help – Out'. Whilst contemplating what best to do about this request the Squadron Leader

received a 'sitrep' saying Tiger has disengaged and withdrawn to the east'. End of contact, to the great relief of all parties!

Captain Taylor's problem was that in his Artillery Observer's tank he only had a dummy gun, which was ineffectually pointing at the Tiger. No doubt frightening its crew. On the other hand the Tiger could not engage him, because its gun was too long and could only traverse up against his turret.

23 January – 2 February The Squadron, less two Troops, remained in WALDEFEUCHT in support of the 4th KOSB. The town was suffering from 'liberation' and littered with B Squadron's tanks; the local inhabitants were mostly peasant types and the town was 'farming orientated'. They had not obeyed their instruction to evacuate the country.

1st Troop were placed under command of 52 Division Reconnaissance Regiment who tried to abuse them by appointing them to spearhead their advance to a village called VOORST. After reference to the Squadron Leader their role was changed to that of 'support' the move. 2nd Troop were placed in support of B Company 12/60th KRRC at the crossroads between WALDEFEUCHT and KONINGSBOSCH. The local population were not hostile to us.

2 February Relieved in WALDEFEUCHT and move back to Holland by road. Transported back to NIGMEGEN and arrive there at 06.00 hrs on the 3rd. We are now preparing for Operation VERITABLE the purpose of which is to eliminate the enemy between the Rs Rhine and Meuse, with a southerly movement, and to link up with the American 9th Army, attacking from the south.

HQ 30 Corps had returned from their Ardennes role.

The initial attack, through the REICHWALD Forest and the low ground to the north of it, was to be undertaken by five Divisions (the 15 Scottish, 43 Wessex and 53 Welsh British Divisions and 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions) supported by 8th Armoured Brigade.

The Squadron was placed under command of 9th Canadian Brigade (Brigadier Rockingham – a very nice chap).

8 February On the 8th February the attack was preceded by 1,000 Artillery pieces firing 1,000 rounds per gun.

The task of 3 Canadian Division was to clear the area immediately south of the Rhine (polder country) up to the railway CLEVE-EMERICH and north of the road NIGMEGEN-CLEVE.

3rd Brigade was, initially, in reserve and was to exploit the successful attack by the other two Brigades, through the SIEGFRIED Line. Owing to the nature of the country (wet and soggy, with many ditches) we were restricted to road movement.

The Brigade plan was to attack with two Battalions up. On the right the GLENGARRY Highlanders, supported by 1st and 3rd Troops and on the left the HLI of Canada, supported by 2nd and 4th Troops. The Squadron was also to participate in the preliminary softening up process by 'pepper-potting' the enemy positions on the Brigade's objective, on D – 1 (8th February). For this purpose 200 rounds were to be fired by each of our 10 75mm gun tanks, including Squadron HQ.

9 February On this day the operation started. The Germans flooded the Polder country north of the road NIGMEGEN – CLEVE. Floods reached 5 feet and three of B Squadron's tanks had to be evacuated and abandoned in the flood, after the initial attacks had captured their objectives.

10 February The Squadron Leader carried out a reconnaissance of the area with the Brigadier in a Buffalo (Amphibious Armoured Personnel Carrier). It was agreed that the Squadron could not participate in the amphibious operations of the Brigade and we were released at 13.00 hrs. In the afternoon the Squadron went to the cinema in Nigmegen.

11 February The Regiment allocated to support 43 Division in a 'swaning' operation to join up with the American 9th Army at GELDFERN. This plan is modified from a 'swan' to a 'slog' by the activities of the opposition which consisted of 7 Para Division, 116 Panzer LEHR and 15 Panzer Grenadier Divisions, who were reluctant to surrender the 'Fatherland' territory.

The Squadron is to support the 7th HANTS. B Squadron is to support the 4th DORSETS and C Squadron the 5th DORSETS, all units of 130 Brigade.

The Squadron moved back to NIGMEGEN where they concentrated with the 7th HANTS, in comfortable billets.

14 February The Squadron moved independently to MATERBORNE, about ½ mile SW of CLEVE, some 15 miles to the east of NIGMEGEN. The plot had been for the Infantry to be transported forward on our tanks on the 13th, but the road through the REICHWALD was now impassable to tanks and the alternative route via GENNEP had first to be repaired. The move was uneventful and we occupied the area allocated to the Echelons of 130 Brigade. The 7 HANTS joined us here.

The plan had now to be changed because 129 Brigade had not captured their objectives. The new intention is that the attack would be continued by the 4th DORSET Group on the 15th. They would be followed by our Group and then the 5th Group.

The objective for our Group was the escarpment NE of GOCH. Each Troop would be in direct support of a Company.

15 February HAMPSHIRE Group moved forward to a Forward Assembly Area. 129 Brigade are still held up. 4th DORSET Group pass through 129 Brigade. Captain Denny moved forward with B Squadron HQ, as a Forward Liaison Officer. The Squadron Leader decided to join him so that he could view the country over which his Battalion Group were to advance/attack. His arrival at B Squadron HQ, whilst he was sitting on Captain Wormald's tank, was greeted by the arrival of a number of very large shells. He judged the area to be distinctly unhealthy. By midday the 4th DORSETS had made little progress and B Squadron were being engaged by enemy SPs and had lost four tanks. The Squadron Leader had seen that during the attack by our Battalion Group, our right flank would be totally exposed to the enemy (5th Para Div and 116 Panzer Lehr – we thought) occupying CLEVE Forest. He therefore arranged that this flank would be 'screened off' by Artillery smoke during the attack. However, in the event this was not necessary. A fog descended and reduced visibility to about 50 yards or less. This gave protection against probable engagement by enemy SPs but made direction keeping, the identification of objectives and control of operations more difficult. The Squadron moved forward to the leading elements of B Squadron, now reported to be reduced to a fighting strength of six mobile tanks, to await arrival of the 7th HANTS.

When the leading company arrived they were directed forward to the location of 3rd Troop, who were to lead the attack, on a 'one Company up' frontage, in the fog.

However, soon after crossing their start line the Company deviated from its axis to the left. The Squadron Leader responded to a request for support for this Company by sending 4th Troop, from the reserve Company Group, to pursue it. At about this time the Company Commander realised that he was 'off course' and managed to return to his proper axis. Unfortunately, his Company then became pinned down by enemy Spandaus and heavy shelling.

4th Troop never made contact with them and finished up in the area of A Company of the 4th DORSETS, where they remained in a counter attack role, whilst that Company was 'digging-in'.

2nd Troop (Lieutenant Spencer) was now ordered to move forward to endeavour to get the leading Company moving again. They made contact with rear elements of the Company but 'en route' Sergeant Hepper spied, at a range of about 40 yards in the fog, an enemy 88mm SP which he engaged and 'brewed-up'. He also engaged enemy Infantry, armed with Bazookers. They were endeavouring to infiltrate across our axis – or had been 'suppressed' as 3rd Troop drove across

them. A further Company was brought forward by the Squadron Leader, to support the leading Company, but they also became 'pinned-down' by enemy heavy shelling. All this time, 3rd Troop was sitting out ahead of every one else, near their objective, alone. It is possible that their successful advance was, in part, due to the fact that there was no preliminary Artillery bombardment heralding the attack and, in part, because their rapid initial movement could not be observed (due to the fog) by the enemy.

Also, of course, they would have been employing the maximum 'Suppressive Fire with Movement' tactic, for which all tanks then carried the maximum amount of additional Browning ammunition, including crates of the stuff on the back of their tanks.

In the landscape in which we were now operating the enemy defensive positions were likely to be either in the woods or in and around the isolated farm building complexes, which dotted the countryside. These latter areas usually had barns, the lofts of which were filled with hay and straw. It was on this day that we learned that MG Tracer bullets would ignite the contents of the lofts with the results that the enemy would be 'flushed out' of the complexes and that the resulting natural smoke screens could prevent enemy SPs from engaging us. During the afternoon 2nd Troop made this discovery.

As no progress was being made by the first two Companies it was decided to attack round the right flank with a third Company closely following 1st Troop (Lieutenant Knowles) in the fog. The Troop reached the NE corner of the CLEVE forest; but the Company did not keep up with it, owing to unallocated Spandaus and Artillery and mortar. Since Lieutenant Knowles sent back Sergeant Bell, on foot, to contact his 'feet'. Sergeant Bell succeeded in doing this and persuaded an Officer of the Company to accompany him back to Lieutenant Knowles. Unfortunately the Officer failed to make the distance, having got stuck in a slit trench, and Sergeant Bell returned alone, somewhat blown.

Sergeant Yeoman's (a second Sergeant in the Troop) tank was disabled by an HE shell which burst on its sprocket. Sergeant Bell's tank became immobilised in an enemy trench system. Some Infantry reached Lieutenant Knowles and he managed to cross the enemy trench system but was then bazookered' his tank 'brewed-up'. Lieutenant Knowles and one of his crew received burn wounds and Trooper Forest, his driver, was killed. Lieutenant Knowles requests permission to withdraw, as his Infantry are so doing. Permission is granted. He was speaking from Sergeant Sell's tank. The diary does not record just what withdrew!

Lieutenant 'Horse' Knowles was an excellent officer in action. Determined, reliable, brave and calm. An account of an action in which he was involved, took place at BOURG LEOPOLD in Belgium, when he was commanding a Troop in B Squadron and is worth repeating from the Regimental history:

"On the 10th (September) the Regiment was ordered to seize BOURG LEOPOLD, and, like many other battles seen in retrospect, the liberation of this place – the one time Armoured School of Belgium – makes quite an amusing story which, as luck would have it, involved no casualties. B Squadron was ordered to occupy the town which lay about three miles along the road from where the Squadron was located. As it had been reported clear of the enemy, no trouble was expected. Nevertheless, all due military precautions were taken, and a barrage was put down ahead by the Artillery in support. The rest of the story is told by the officer commanding the leading troop (Captain J H Aldam):-

'About half a mile down the road – a cobblestoned, tree-lined avenue – Lieutenant Knowles' tank and my own had just turned a slight right hand corner, when there was a flash and a streak of light passed across the front of Knowles' tank. I thought he had been hit as the tank immediately stopped, but I was most relieved to see him reverse slightly into the side and then open fire with his anti-aircraft gun down the road.

'I reported to the Squadron Leader over the wireless, and he then came up and asked Knowles if he could see the gun in question. I looked over and saw him pick up his microphone with his free hand – he was gaily firing his anti-aircraft gun with the other – and replied: "See it ? I'm looking right down the barrel of the thing."

'Meanwhile we were firing away steadily until a message came over from Knowles; "My gun has jammed." I brought up Sergeant York, who resumed firing high explosive down the road. Apparently Knowles had been reading "Hatter's Castle" just before the battle began and had put the book down on top of the gun. When he had fired off his first round of high explosive, the book had become jammed in the recoil and the gun would not reload. Whilst Sergeant York and I continued our barrage down the road, he was busily engaged in pushing his gun up against various trees until, at last, he found one strong enough to make his gun recoil sufficiently to enable him to extract the erring book.

'When he reported his gun OK, we rocketed off down the road once more firing every gun we could muster in every direction. We paused to put a round into the enemy gun which had been annoying us so much – a 75mm anti-tank gun – and then we entered BOURG LEOPOLD itself, spraying every building with machine gun and high explosive fire. As there were no Infantry with us and we had seen a few Germans running about in the area, we kept up sporadic firing to protect ourselves whilst we moved along the street.

'I was looking out of the turret across some railway tracks, when I spied a Boche crawling in the grass quite close to my tank. I immediately fired on him with my machine gun and pistol, but he had the cover of some concrete railings and I could not deal with him to my satisfaction. I then called up my 17-pounder, which was standing on the crossroads just behind, and told him to put a round of high explosive into the grass. As the great long barrel came menacingly round, a dirty white rag on the end of a very long pole peeped gingerly up out of what, I then saw, to be a trench in the grass. One by one they emerged twelve paratroopers covered with stick grenades and lugers. I held them covered from my turret whilst my hull gunner, who had been dreaming of a chance like this, hopped out to glean the assembled harvest of pistols. We then seated our prisoners on the front of the tanks and prepared to take our leave.

'When the order came to go back, I turned round to put a round of high explosive into the Boche ammunition truck, which went up like a chandelier flare. As we roared back up the road on our happy way home, we found that the road down which we had blazed our way, not an hour before, was lined with all manner of Belgian people cheering and waving flags. It was most touching that these self-same people, whose homes we had been obliged to ravage with shot and shell that very afternoon, had so soon forgiven and forgotten everything in the joy of their liberation. A fitting end to a bloodless and successful afternoon.'

To return to the 15th February.

The Squadron having committed three of its Troops recalled 4th Troop from defensive role with the 4th DORSETS. They were ordered to rally at Battalion HQ of the 7th HANTS. They got slightly lost in the fog; but were able to locate the RV when VEREY Lights and Browning MG Tracer Bullets were fired into the sky from Bn HQ. Lieutenant Lucas, recently arrived, was wounded by shrapnel.

2nd Troop were making some slow progress between 'stonks' and watching burning farm buildings.

After dark the Reserve Company was launched at the original objective, along the original axis. They passed through the areas captured by the other two Companies and made contact with 3rd Troop. With the support of this Troop which was given by engaging, in the dark, any area from which they saw the enemy firing at them, they captured their objective. They remained with the Company during the night, which was quite eventful in that they were unsuccessfully counter attacked by the enemy and also by the 4th DORSETS. They were shot at by SPs and Bazookas, but received no hits or casualties.

The Battalion plan for the next day was to continue the advance at first light, supported by 2nd and 4th Troops.

16 February A dark morning with the fog persisting.

The night had not been quiet, with much shelling, mortaring and High Velocity shots being fired in our direction by SPs.

Squadron HQ and 2nd Troop moved forward to the area of 3rd Troop, 2nd Troop locate one of the Companies which has already been attempting to advance, without much success; but they did capture one farm complex. Squadron HQ halted on the road, where they decided to have breakfast! Suddenly there was a hail of MG fire coming up the road from behind them. The rear of Captain Denny's tank was hit. Squadron HQ hastily move off the road. Out of the fog appeared a Troop of Sherman tanks. These tanks were a Troop of C Squadron commanded by Lieutenant DOWNER who were meant to be leading an attack by the 5th DORSETS; out but on an entirely different axis and who were taking 'suppressive' action. Fortunately, there were no major casualties. Minor casualties were Captain Denny's crews bedding, his stock of whisky, the Squadron Leader's breakfast and his cooker, over which the 'enemy' had driven their tanks.

The 'enemy' halted when they realised that they had made a mistake. The Squadron Leader had a word or two to say to Lieutenant Downer! He also conveyed his views to C Squadron Leader.

Few shells fell in the area of Squadron HQ. Captain Walker collected a small piece of shrapnel in his paw (he had enormous hands). Squadron Leader personally led 4th Troop to the area of 2nd Troop, he did not wish them to get lost again. Visibility now about 150 yards, which was good from our point of view in this area being infested with enemy SPs. Two Companies, supported by 2nd and 4th Troops, renewed the attack but made little progress, due to enemy shelling. Another farm is captured.

Another Brigade is ordered to take over the lead, supported by the 4/7 DG. The Squadron gave fire support to their attack, which was directed at the woods on our right. The attack was successful. The Squadron rallied in the area of Battalion HQ, to re-arm and to be in a counter attack role. The shelling this day was very heavy indeed and the Battalion suffered many casualties. Nebelwerfers were also fired at our positions.

17 February At first light one Troop was despatched to the area of the right leading Company, in order to support it in case it should suddenly be attacked by the enemy from the Forest of CLEVE. After lunch the Squadron was ordered to withdraw into CLEVE. We are now to support 53 (Welsh) Division whose task will (again) be to link up with the 9th US Army in the area of GLEDERN, some 25 miles south of CLEVE, through GOCH (10 miles south of CLEVE) when GOCH has been captured by 15 (Scottish) Division.

On arrival in CLEVE we found covered accommodation for most of the Troops but the town had been fairly well 'liberated'.

Captain Walker had to retire, temporarily, to the Echelon, as his hand wound had gone bad on him.

18 – 22 February Remain in CLEVE. No fun. Carry out personal and vehicular maintenance. Occasional enemy shelling.

The plan with 53 (Welsh) Division is to form armoured and Infantry 'Jock' columns and to 'Swan' southwards towards the Americans. The Infantry would be carried on the tanks!

The Regiment was to operate with 160 Brigade.

A Squadron was to carry the 2nd Battalion of the MONMOUTHSHIRE Regiment. We were to be on the right of two axis of advance, with our first objective as the high ground west of WEEZE (3 miles south of GOCH).

The Swan was to start with a 'dawn' dash to the first objective (WEELE). The opposition was known to be elements of 7th and 8th Para Divisions, supported by SP anti-tank guns.

23 February The Regiment moved to GOCH. The Squadron occupied a 'liberated' Nunnery. The town had been very severely bombed and shelled and was largely piles of rubble.

The 'Swanning' plan has now been abandoned. The enemy are known to be holding the 'woods' about 1,200 yards to the south of GOCH in some strength. Mines are expected to have been laid and anti-tank ditches are under construction.

The task of 160 Brigade Group is to capture the 'woods' to the south of GOCH and to exploit to the south therefrom. The plan is to attack with two Battalions 'up'.

2 MONS on the right, supported by A Squadron, is attacking with three companies 'up'. Each Company will be led into the attack by one Troop (right to left – 2, 4, 3).

'H' Hour is to be at 06.00 hrs tomorrow (just after first light). The attack will be preceded by Artillery concentrations on the 'woods', starting at 05.50 hrs. Smoke has been requested, by the Squadron Leader, to be mixed with the HE concentrations and is also to be laid as a screen on our right, exposed and open, flank.

The Squadron Leader went to the location of the 1st Battalion of the BLACK WATCH, through whom we are to attack and from whence he could see the ground over which we were to move and also the objective. (1 BW were in 15th Brigade of 51 Highland Division who had relieved 15 (Scottish) Division, the captors of GOCH). He selected positions for Squadron Tactical HQ and 1st Troop, in the area of the 1 BW, from which the assaulting Troops could best be supported. He also selected start points from which each Company/Troop Group would commence their attack and since the move thereto was to be carried out in the dark, he made a careful reconnaissance of the route to be taken to the start points/line.

The Battalion O Group of the 2 MONS was held at 18.30 hrs and continued until it was almost dark. Immediately thereafter the Squadron Leader took Troop Commanders on a reconnaissance of their routes to their start points, from which they were just able to see the outline of their objective, in the 'glooming'.

24 February The Squadron moved from the Nunnery at 03.00 hrs to the location of the 2 MONS where Troops picked up their Companies who they were to carry forward to their start points on their tanks. The early move was dictated by the fact that the Squadron Leader had decided that we should make a 'silent' approach to the start points. His reasons for making this decision were as follows:

Firstly, that the normal noise of tank movement (engines and the clatter of tracks on the road), particularly in the dark, would 'alarm' the enemy who would be certain to open fire with Artillery and mortars. This would not only irritate the 1 BW but would also be likely to cause casualties to the Infantry being carried on our tanks. In fact, it might mean that the attack would not be launched on time, if at all. Secondly, that if the enemy did not know that tanks were in the area they might not have deployed their full anti-tank SP potential with which to engage them.

In order to ensure that the approach to the start points was 'silent' the Squadron Leader headed the column himself and undertook the final mile or so on foot, in front of his own tank.

The Troops reached their positions at about 05.30 hrs without 'alarming' the enemy. It was interesting that our approach was not, apparently heard. The objective could just be seen when

the Artillery concentrations came down. They gave the objective a 'jolly' stonking. In reply the enemy launched some Nebelwerfers at us from our right front. During the day these were not successfully engaged by counter battery fire.

At 'H' Hour our attack started with the tanks engaging the enemy positions with 'suppressive' fire. A couple of Spandaus which opened fire from the right of the objective were quickly silenced. The objective was captured but not without many casualties, mainly due to enemy Artillery fire, particularly to our Infantry on the objective before they could dig themselves in.

It was a difficult day for the Squadron. Two tanks were 'brewed-up' by anti-tank guns, three crewmen were killed, three other tanks were bazookered and another three were disabled by direct hits by enemy (medium or heavy) Artillery shells. Our main casualties were suffered by 2nd Troop who, on approaching their objective, ran into a minefield where Sergeant Hepper's tank lost a track and was immobilised. Sergeant Hepper continued to give fire support from his tank and according to Group Captain Pat Hennessey's account of the incident, 'he was advised to leave his tank but replied that he could keep his guns firing a bit longer'. Unfortunately a gap in the 'flank' smoke screen occurred and the Squadron Leader saw his tank struck by an AP shot. This killed Sergeant Hepper and his gunner, Trooper Cowan. His own crewmen 'bailed-out' and escaped injury. (Sergeant Hepper had been awarded the Military Medal on 'D' Day. He had been with the Regiment since mobilisation, when he had joined us from the RTR reserve, at the same time as Sergeant Morris, MM, who was still with us. He was a brave and efficient Troop Sergeant and was the only member of the pre 'D' Day Squadron Sergeant Mess to be a fatal casualty during the campaign in Europe; which accorded with Sergeant Marke's premonition!)

The diary stated that the Squadron Leader sent two tanks from the reserve Troop (1st) to support and to come under command of 2nd Lieutenant Spencer (2nd Troop). The new leading tank of that Troop (after Sergeant Hepper became immobilised) was also immobilised by a mine, when it was only about 15 yards from the enemy position. Another tank of the Troop was bazookered. Lieutenant Spencer's tank was then also hit by two bazookers but in spite of this, he continued to engage the enemy positions in support of his other disabled tanks whilst their crews 'bailed out' and took some shelter from enemy Artillery fire behind his tank. His tank was then hit and 'brewed-up' by an AP shot. His driver was killed. He himself, tried to rescue his driver (who he did not realise was dead) from his tank but he was twice blown off his turret by blasts from explosions. The surviving tank in his Troop (Group Sergeant Hammond) continued to engage the enemy, until it ran out of ammunition. Meanwhile, the Infantry had caught up with him and captured their objective. Lieutenant Spencer then withdrew with his dismounted crewmen. For his determination and leadership in this engagement he was awarded a Military Cross.

In the centre, 4th Troop fared better. They captured their sector of the objective without tank casualties; but later had one hit by Artillery shell and immobilised (Sergeant Morris).

On the left, 3rd Troop (Lieutenant Garlick, mounted in his new set of tanks, after the destruction of his Troop at the PEPPINS BEEK road block) had problems. He encountered an enemy trench system and large bomb craters. Sergeant Rattle's and Corporal Binns' (both of whom were awarded the Military Medal during the campaign) became immobilised; but were able to give fire support to the attacking Infantry who, with Lieutenant Garlick, captured their sector of the objective. Lieutenant Garlick reported that there was much enemy movement to his front and left front.

Believing this to herald a counter attack the Squadron Leader ordered 1st Troop Leader (Lieutenant Hunt) to move with his one remaining tank to 3rd Troop's location. Unfortunately Lieutenant Hunt and his other tank became 'bogged down'. The Squadron Leader therefore went to 3rd Troop's location himself, taking Captain Taylor (Essex Yeomanry) with him. On arrival in the location Captain Taylor, who had at his disposal something in the order of three Divisional Artilleries and an AGRA (Army Group Royal Artillery, with medium and heavy guns), caused the enemy positions to be severely 'stonked'. The counter attack did not materialise. A counter attack on the right front was repulsed.

The Squadron Leader then went to the assistance of the two bogged tanks of 1st Troop which he succeeded in freeing. They then joined Lieutenant Garlick as did, later in the morning, his own immobilised tanks.

Squadron Tac HQ moved to the centre of the objective, which was to be known as Mons wood. Here, whilst standing behind his tank discussing the situation with a Company Commander, the Squadron Leader recalls that he looked up towards the turret of his tank and saw a large 'prune' descending upon him from the sky. He shouted 'down' and spontaneously ducked. There was then a large explosion not very far behind his tank. During the day three tanks were disabled in this key (Captain Taylor's, Sergeant Holdsworth's and Sergeant Morris'). Shelling was as heavy as any encountered in Normandy. The Infantry suffered many casualties. Captain Walker was hit in the leg by shrapnel whilst he was walking from Battalion HQ, in a cellar, to his tank. He remained at his post until relieved by Lieutenant Richardson, from RHQ, at about 21.00 hrs. Approximately 120 PsOW were taken by the Battalion. There were many more less mobile enemy on the objective.

In the evening C Squadron passed through our positions, in support of the 4th WELSH and captured the wood further to the south, without encountering any opposition.

Here the diary ends

This was probably because our next engagement was on the 5th March, immediately after which the Squadron Leader went on leave to the UK, arriving back in time for the Rhine Crossing; but he never got around to completing the diary. He left the Squadron (in which he had spent the whole of his service) in BREMEN when he was suddenly posted to command the 25th Dragoons in India. (BLA – Burma Looms Ahead).

25 February – 4 March The Regiment remained out of action, refitting until the 4th March when A and C Squadron moved to KEVELAR and then on to WEERT, about three miles north of GELDERN, which had by then been captured. Late that night the Squadron Leaders attended an O Group at the HQ of 160 Brigade of 53 WELSH Division.

The Squadron was again to support the 2nd MONS, who were to lead an advance NE from GELDERN to occupy an escarpment at ALPON (a distance of about 10 miles) along the main road to the crossing of the R Rhine at WESEL, about 6 miles beyond it. The escarpment overlooked the Rhine valley. It would seem that little opposition was to be expected, since there was no Artillery fire plan and the advance was to begin at 04.00 hrs in the dark, the next morning.

Somehow, the advance took off on time. I think that possibly the axis of advance as far as the German Garrison town of ISSUM, about five miles NE of GELDERN, had been secured and that our start line was the bridge over a stream about one mile beyond the town.

The Regimental history records that the enemy were encountered one mile short of the start line but that this did not alter the plan. On the left of the axis the country was open; but with some fairly large woods and farm building complexes, ideal for the operation of enemy SPs. On the right of the axis there was a forest, the edge of which was at times close to the road and in other places was about 1,000 yards away. This provided excellent cover for the enemy to engage our advance up the road.

During the advance with the 2nd MONS we lost three tanks to SPs firing at us from our left front, flank and rear, in spite of extensive use of Artillery smoke. I recall the loss of one of these tanks. I had passed it during a period of 'Artillery smoke' and I saw that it was halted on the exposed (to SPs on our left flank) side of a house. I repeatedly called the Crew Commander on the radio, to tell him to move his tank to the other side of the building but I got no reply. There was then the familiar crack of an AP shot. The tank was hit and the operator killed. I think that the Tank Commander was dismounted at the time, talking to the Infantry Commander. It was unnecessary casualty and might not have occurred if the radio had been answered. The operator may have

been on the B Set (Troop Net). Sad, also because the man concerned had spoken to me beforehand and had told me that he feared for his life on this occasion. I told him not to be so apprehensive. Possibly I should have sent him back to the Echelon for the day. There was another soldier in the Squadron who had a premonition about his fate on this day. His story is told by (Gp Captain) Pat Hennessey.

“We were heading on now to the banks of the Rhein, there was not very far to go, but we had to fight our way there. One morning, just before we started off, I was talking to Jack Maxwell. Normally, he was full of fun and optimism, but not on that day. He was very serious and depressed, and though I tried to jolly him along, he would have none of it. He told me that he had packed up his personal kit and had left it and some letters with the Quartermaster.

“I’ve been bloody lucky up to now”, he said, “but I have the feeling that I am not coming back from this lot”.

That day, we have a number of skirmishes, but it was by no means a hard fighting day. When we harboured for the night, I learned that Maxwell’s tank had been hit. Apparently, the shot had come in at the driver’s visor, and Jack had been killed outright.

This incident caused much speculation as I was not the only one to whom Jack had spoken of his premonition. Could it be that he knew for certain that the end had come? Or was it merely coincidence? There was no doubting his sincerity when he spoke of it and one had heard of similar cases of men forecasting that they would not come back, particularly in aircrew. What is certain is that the longer one survives in battle, seeing one’s comrades falling day by day, the more one begins to wonder how much longer the luck can last.

It is not a thing to dwell on, but I am sure that every fighting soldier has had the feeling. The first time in action is the easiest, thereafter, one starts to weigh up the chances of survival. A great many of those I had known and trained with had gone since D Day, even the indestructible Charlie Battle was wounded and evacuated to England on this day.”

In addition to the SP anti-tank weapons there was a considerable amount of opposition from Infantry weapons and much Artillery fire. By about midday we had advanced about half the way to our objective. 2nd MONS had ‘run out of steam’, that is to say all Companies had been committed to capture and hold specific and limited objectives. Casualties had been quite substantial.

In my opinion a further advance directly up the main road would only incur more casualties and, therefore, a right flanking movement through the forest would seem to be necessary. This move was, in fact, ordered to be undertaken by the 4th WELSH, still with our Squadron in support.

Movement by tanks in the forest was restricted to the forest tracks but, at least, we did not have completely open and unsecured flanks.

The forest through the edge of which the 4 WELSH were to attack was about two miles wide and three miles long, running approximately parallel to the main road axis along which we were to have advanced.

The 4th WELSH objective was (still) the escarpment just short of the town of ALPPON and overlooking the R Rhine valley, at a point where the forests NE corner touched the main road.

From the end of the forest the enemy could control, by fire, all movement along the road whilst it also gave complete freedom for concealed movement along its length.

Initially, 3rd Troop was leading in support of a Company of the Battalion. Each Company had a limited objective along the edge of the forest. However, the Troop was finally engaged by an enemy anti-tank weapon, which was supporting the enemy dug in defensive position on the forest track along which they were advancing.

An account of the incident is told thus, in 1991, by (L/Cpl) Pat Beasley;

"I believe that it was the 5th March near ALPON when both Sergeant Charlie Rattle and Corporal Reggie Binns were wounded. By this time I was a L/Cpl and was following behind then as Crew Commander of a 17 pdr tank in pretty thick pine woods. We were moving in single file, I think, because of the thickness of the wood. I heard the crack of gunfire and saw chaps bailing out in front of me and at that very moment my tank just sank into a trench system and ended up well and truly stuck at about a 45 degree angle.

So, my crew and I went forward to help the wounded. (This indicates that the enemy had either withdrawn from that area or been captured. It was also likely that the enemy SP which had engaged the Troop was located on a main road which ran through the forest from the south and joined the GELDERN-WESEL road at our objective – the escarpment. From this road they could see down the forest tracks/rides.)

I remember Shuttleworth, Charlie's driver had a facial wound; but could walk. Charlie was minus a boot and had an injury to his heel, but could hop along a bit. Reggie Binns had collected some shrapnel in his chest but this was not serious. As we slowly made our way back, we passed your (Squadron Leader's) tank at some point, I believe, but I cannot clearly remember that. What I do remember was an amazing occurrence. A German Medical Officer and a soldier carrying a black box with a large Red Cross came across a field and joined us. I drew my revolver but the officer spoke perfect English and told me that he only wanted to find a building or shelter in which to set up a Medical Post to treat all soldiers, no matter where they came from. Charlie and I accepted this and our now enlarged group went slowly on until we came to a farm house. On arrival there the MO stripped off his jacket and while he was washing his hands shouted 'Essen', I think it was, and the lady of the house held a piece of black looking bread for him to eat. From then on he was the organiser and in control in that house which quickly filled up with wounded, mostly Welshmen.

After I had seen him attend to Charlie – the doctor told him that it was only a flesh wound; but I think myself it turned out to be a bit more serious than that – I left with my crew to walk further back. Within a short distance we heard a Welsh voice shouting for help. I could not see him but I found him in a hollow with a shattered thigh. He had a tourniquet on and told me that his mate had put it on and had gone off to organise a stretcher. He also told me that it was a minefield and to be careful – so I was. I eventually found an Officer and four Welsh lads who knew about this chap and were waiting for a mine detector to arrive. They also told me that it had been a bad day and that they had suffered a great many casualties.

My crew had, by now, gone further back so I found my own way back to A1 Echelon where Duffy Hind (the Regimental Sergeant Major) came to meet me and gave me a drink of rum and looked after me for a while.

On reflection, I remember the MO saying, as we walked along together, "I am sure the war is lost for us now. We have not eaten for two days." He must have decided to give up. Whatever it was, he made a great impression on me. He was obviously a leader and a fine figure of a man and I wished him well.

PS I want you to know that this really happened. Sid"

4th Troop then took over the supporting role and lost a tank on a mine. It was already late in the afternoon when the 4th WELSH launched their fourth Company to capture the (final) objective – the NE tongue of the forest where it bordered the main GELDERN-WESEL road on the escarpment. By then the Squadron's tanks had all been deployed or had become casualties. The remnants of two Troops were in defensive positions with the 2nd MONS on their open left flank where the enemy tanks or SPs were known to impose a threat. Two Troops had been supporting the 4th WELSH, one of which had been written off and the other had lost a tank on a mine; but still had two mobile tanks. Three crewmen had been killed and several wounded.

Realising that the final attack would require the maximum support and that the objective was of considerable strategic importance to both sides and that its capture would almost certainly engender an enemy counter attack, the Squadron Leader decided to form a composite Troop, which he himself joined, with which to support the attack. On his way to the start point, along a track in the forest he met Sergeant Rattle and his dismounted party. Sergeant Rattle was in good form. Smiling, he raised a bandaged hand and shouted 'Blighty for me'. (He had in fact lost two joints of a forefinger – but was also limping badly.) A little further along the track were some very young WELSH soldiers, sitting on the ground and crying, saying that 'we do not wish to die'. He tried to encourage them to follow him; this they declined to do.

The attack was successful. The survivors of the attack were three tanks, one Sergeant of the 4 WELSH and six of their soldiers. The Squadron Leader (a survivor) reported the situation to the Battalion Commander through our Liaison Officer at Battalion HQ. It was now nearly dark. He told him that we could not hold the position against enemy counter attack during the night. He also got into direct radio contact with our CO (The Earl of Feversham) and reported his predicament to him. His reply was as follows. "Hello Derrick, Hello Derrick. Keep calm, keep calm. I will do my best. Out". So we kept calm and as quiet as possible, having collected ourselves into a little defensive 'huddle', and listened for enemy activity. Initially, listening was difficult because a wounded Welshman not far away persisted in calling for help. Sergeant Morris and the Squadron Leader dismounted and collected him, dressed his wound, and lifted him onto the engine cover of the Squadron Leader's tank, where we made him as comfortable as possible. This silenced him and we were able to listen! Any noises that we heard were engaged by 'suppressive' MG fire.

Four hours after the request for reinforcement was made the Carrier Platoon of the 4 WELSH arrived and we felt better able to defend the position. This we were able to do until we were relieved by two Troops of C Squadron and some additional Infantry the following morning.

Pat Hennessey described the day's activities as 'skirmishes'. The Squadron Leader thought that it was a 'bloody awful' day. The Brigade's plan for the day was probably based upon the usual over optimistic and inaccurate intelligence reports about the enemy withdrawals. It was certainly undertaken without any reconnaissance of the ground over which we were to attack and without any pre-arranged Artillery support.

As at Mons Wood, enemy shelling and mortaring was very heavy and inflicted severe casualties amongst the Infantry. In addition, it 'pinned' them down for long periods, a situation about which we could do nothing, except wait for them to get moving again. To have advanced without them in the forest would have been possible, with suppressive fire; but it would have proved to be fatal when we would have been sitting alone on the objective amongst the enemy with Bazookas.

After being relieved, the Squadron went into Regimental reserve. Operations in the area continued for two days and on the 9th the Americans were observed to be advancing down the Rhine valley from the south and the Guards Armoured Division were closing in from the north.

On the 10th the Regiment were relieved by the 34th Tank Brigade and moved back to ISSUM and then on the 12th to GOCH, via GELDERN and WEEZE. In GOCH they prepared themselves for the RHINE crossing and the 'swan' across the North German Plain, to BREMEN.

The Squadron Leader was sent on leave to the UK.

Approaching the port of embarkation his jeep, driven by Trooper Cummings (?), was forced by an oncoming American Military convoy, off the road and into a ditch. During this process he sustained a badly cut eyebrow. Someone took him to the local Nunnery where one of the good ladies stitched his eyebrow back into place. He then continued on his journey but had missed his original 'sailing'. He arrived home, in Dumfriesshire, appearing to have been wounded. During his leave he spent most of his time fishing the River Eden for salmon on the Warwick Hall water, by the kind

permission of Colonel Geoffrey Elwes, and also on the Yorkshire Angler's water at Armathwaite. Not without some luck, as recorded in his father's Game Book.

On the day that the Regiment arrived in GOCH an ME 262 dropped a bomb which exploded near RHQ killing seven soldiers and wounding 28. Later in the day one soldier of B Squadron was killed and four wounded by enemy shelling of the town. These were the Regiment's most severe casualties in a single day since 'D' Day (and furthermore when we were not engaged in a battle).

23 March Air and Artillery bombardment for the RHINE crossing began at 5 pm. On the following day we witnessed the flying into the river bridgehead, established by the 51 Highland Division, of 40,000 airborne troops.

After crossing the river the Regiment was to support 130 Brigade of 43 Wessex Division, on the left flank of 30 Corps.

C Squadron started to cross the river at 4 am on the 25th; but were not completely across until 10 am the next day. After much delay A and B Squadrons were across by midday.

I do not recall much about the advance from the RHINE to BREMEN from whence I left the Regiment.

The incidents which I do recall were as follows:-

The Squadron's first operation was in support of the 7 HANTS, to expand the bridgehead, to the NW. For this operation I had arranged for smoke to be mixed with the HE Artillery concentrations to be fired at potential enemy positions along the axis of our advance and also to be fired, to provide a screen, on our left 'open' flank. Suddenly the smoke ceased. There was the familiar 'crack' of AP shot. Two tanks on my left were hit. We fired tracer into the barns of the farm buildings to set them ablaze and also our own smoke, to re-create the screen. Five crewmen were killed, including Jack Maxwell whose premonition of his demise was recalled earlier (24 February). I was very cross about the lifting of our smoke protection, without any warning. I complained to the Infantry Brigade Commander, (T F Coade – late of the 5 DORSETS). He told me that he had considered that it was not any longer necessary and that he had ordered it to be stopped. I was angry and told him that he was entirely responsible for the death of my soldiers. These were our last casualties of the campaign. The second incident was when the Regiment were leading the advance towards a bridge over a river. B Squadron ran into some quite strong opposition in woods on the approach to the river and lost some tanks. I was ordered, with B Company of the 12/60th, to carry out a left flanking movement. This we did by deviating rather widely via a track to the next bridge downstream (to the west) of the bridge, the approach to which was being opposed. We reached the bridge without encountering any opposition. However, when I, accompanied by Major William Deeds (Lord Deeds) and Captain Taylor, went to reconnoitre the bridge on foot we were engaged by Spandau fire. We withdrew along a ditch beside the road and reported that the bridge was 'blown' and that there were some enemy on the far side. From subsequent discussions I gather that my superiors had not intended that the flanking movement should have been so 'wide'; but we had avoided another encounter with the enemy. A crossing via this bridge site was made during the night, thus bypassing the enemy opposing us and causing them to withdraw, which opened up the main axis without further bloodshed. The third incident was when an Infantry Brigade attack, with full 'planned' Artillery support, was to be launched against a village which the enemy were reported by intelligence sources, to be defending in some length.

Shortly before the designated 'H' Hour a Mercedes car drove into our position, from the village, Out of the car stepped Captain Walker, the Squadron's 2nd Captain. He reported that he had been on a personal reconnaissance of the village, with a view to finding a suitable car to replace the Citroen which we had acquired near ARRAS on the 2nd September, and that his entry and search had been unopposed! His information about the enemy was passed to Brigade HQ, who after having it confirmed by an Infantry patrol, called off the attack.

My final recollection was of a similar nature. We were in the outskirts of BREMEN. I had handed the Squadron over to Major Akers-Douglas. A Brigade attack was planned, again with full Artillery support. The Squadron were to support the 7 HANTS. I was convinced that there were no enemy in the vicinity. I therefore reconnoitered the axis of the proposed advance in our Scout Car and met a British Officer in a jeep coming from the other direction. This attack was also called off. That day I left the Regiment, never to return to serve in it. I nearly did so, in 1950, when I was posted to rejoin it in Malaysia. My heavy baggage preceded me by sea. I was to fly out later. Unexpectedly I was diverted to Command the 1st Armoured Car Regiment of the Arab Legion in Jordan. There I stayed for four years, during which time my Command grew by the raising of new units, to two Armoured Car Regiments, an Armoured Regiment, a Junior Leaders Regiment and a D&M School and by the addition of a Motor Battalion and a Desert Recce Squadron.

Also, in the last six months, by the Command of the Northern Frontier District with Israel, from RAMALLAH to GALALEE, with the equivalent of about 5 TA Battalions.

I had returned to England just in time for my 29th birthday (28/4). I had four weeks leave before I flew to India to Command the 25th Dragoons which was to be the (Sherman) DD Regiment to be employed in the assault and recapture of Malaysia, which would have been a disaster.

A brief account of the operations by the Regiment during the advance from the RHINE to BREMEN, extracted from the Regimental history, reads thus:-

“The bridgehead continued to expand, A and B Squadrons supporting the 7th Hampshire Regiment and the 5th Dorsetshire Regiment respectively in an attack on MILLENGEN along the line of the main railway running to the south east. The attack was successful and some two hundred prisoners were captured. Our men pushed steadily forward through ANHOLT to SINDEREN where they were ready to exploit the breakout on the 31st.

The Regiment now came under command of the 214th Brigade (43rd Division) forming part of an armoured column leaving the left of the advance. Their first objective was the capture of a crossing over the canal at GOOR, but this failed as the enemy blew the bridge when the leading tank of C Squadron was within fifteen yards of it. This caused some delay and the Regiment remained in the area of DIEPENHEIM and NEEDE until the 3rd, when they moved to the south of HENGELO where a crossing had been effected to the east. On the night of the 6th April, the Regiment reached NORDHORN, moving to LINGEN the following day, where some stiff fighting had taken place, before crossings over the RIVER EMS and the DORTMUND/EMS CANAL could be effected.

The Regiment was now off again and crossed the bridge at LINGEN that evening. From there on the advance was slow owing to numerous reports from prisoners and civilians that the woods ahead were full of SPs ‘bazookas’ and 20 mm guns. It was therefore decided that A Squadron, carrying the 7th Somerset Light Infantry on their tanks and supported by B Company 12th/60th King’s Royal Rifle Corps, should make a charge up the road preceded by a ten-minute barrage. This modern version of cavalry charge was highly successful and the objective was reached. A Squadron remained on it for the night whilst the remainder of the Regiment leaguered on the verges of the road about two miles in rear.

On the following day, BAWINKEL was captured and the Regiment stayed there until the 12th for rest and maintenance before it moved to HASELUNNE to rejoin the 214th Brigade, Squadrons being allotted in support of Battalions.

A plan had now to be made for the capture of CLOPPENBURG and AHLHORN; the 130th Brigade was to be in the lead for the attack on the former, whilst the 214th Brigade was to pass through to attack the latter. C Squadron with the 1st Worcestershire Regiment moved forward as advance guard on the 14th but, when some two thousand yards from the river south of AHLHORN, the bridge was blown. An alternative crossing however, was soon found a short distance to the south and a bridgehead was successfully established. Early on the 15th the enemy put in a sharp

counter-attack which at first met with some success, one C Squadron tank being hit by a 'bazooka' and the Worcestershire Regiment suffering casualties, but the situation was soon restored and heavy casualties were inflicted upon the enemy.

Further fighting took place before AHLHORN and the woods to the north could be cleared, but the advance continued, slowly but surely, until the 21st found the Regiment in DELMENHORST after a fierce battle in the northern suburbs of the town in which B Squadron had a tank hit by an SP and suffered a few casualties. The Regiment continued fighting step by step through the southern outskirts of BREMEN, crossing the WESER on the afternoon of the 23rd, where Lieutenant Moulding, B Squadron, died of wounds as a result of a direct hit on his tank by an SP.

Early on the 27th all resistance in BREMEN came to an end, and the Regiment was concentrated in the town for two days before moving to QUELKHORN in support of 214th Brigade, who were engaged in clearing up the area. On the 2nd May armoured support was no longer considered necessary for this purpose and the Regiment was placed under command of the 129 Brigade to operate towards BREMERHAVEN, from the south-east, but on the 4th this operation was cancelled since all German forces opposite 21st Army Group had surrendered.

Although the foregoing narrative only briefly describes the actions which were fought, it must not be thought that the going was easy. There was never the slightest doubt in the minds of anyone that the German was beaten and that his end was near, but there were always stouthearted enemy ready to defend and even counter-attack each successive bound, and the well concealed SP and 88 mm guns were as ready as ever to give a knockout blow to the over-rash or unwary tank. All ranks of the Regiment, however, had by this time learned their lessons on many hard fought battlefields and knew how to combine confidence with proper caution, and dash with sound discretion, thus avoiding many unnecessary casualties. In other words, the Regiment was now vastly experienced and supremely expert at its job."

Glancing through a copy of the Regiment Journal of August 1945 (HANOVER) I was interested in the A Squadron notes which included the following extract:

"The Squadron, with B Squadron, were the first troops of the entire AEF to land in Normandy on D Day. Out of the twenty tanks, only five got off the beach. Fortunately our personnel casualties were small.

On 23rd June the Squadron attacked Ste Honorine La Chardonnerette with the 5th Camerons of the 51st Highland Division. Our bag for the day was eleven German tanks, two armoured cars and some other enemy vehicles for no loss of our own.

On 6th August the Squadron captured Mount Pincon, which marked the turning point in the Normandy campaign.

Sergeant Marke, who has for many years been a devotee of spiritualism, has a friend who frequently communicates with him from the next world. This character is known to him and the entire Squadron as 'Jimmy the Wog'. He forecast that there would be no casualties in our Sergeants' Mess during the campaign, and was quite right until Sergeant Gammon was wounded at the end of November, by which time B and C Squadrons had very few of their original Sergeants left. Sergeants Hepper and Rattle were the only other two casualties.

Sergeant Charlie Rattle was wounded just west of the Rhine and left us with the remark "Skipton, here I come!"

This journal also included the Regimental casualty list which showed that during the campaign the WOs' and Sgts' Mess suffered the following casualties:

WOs and Sgts killed	-	16
WOs and Sgts wounded	-	25

of these the Squadron's contributions had been one killed and three wounded.

Sergeant Marke's pre D Day prediction had been 'out of this world'! Tactics may have played a part.

GALLIPOLI MAY 1915

I thought that it might be of interest to the readers of this diary to see a report written by General Birdwood, as Commander of the ANZAC Army Corps, on the Assault Landing at ANZAC Cove in April 1915. I happen to have a copy of the report which was sent by General Birdwood (ex 12th Royal Lancer) to my uncle, Brigadier Frank (Scrubbs) Wormald, who was at that time commanding the 12th in France. (He was later killed near YPRES, when commanding the 5th Cavalry Brigade).

Army Corps Headquarters
ANZAC Cove, 10th May 1915

Mr dear Scrubbs

Very glad to get yours of the 16th April, and I do hope the time may shortly come when you will be able to take on the Germans in proper style at the head of the regiment, and do some real good cavalry work. In case you care to see it, I enclose a copy, for your private information, of a letter I have just written giving an account of the landing of my Army Corps here. I am afraid I do not by any means do full justice to the gallantry and magnificent dash of my Australians, for it is really impossible to do this without seeing the appallingly difficult nature of the country covered as it is with dense scrub and trenches. We are now hanging on to this rather like flies, until such time as the remainder of Sir Ian's force can make headway as we hope it may do very shortly, but even then we are only at the beginning of an extraordinarily difficult campaign, as the Germans have fully prepared this country with wire, trenches, etc., as they have done in France, while the nature of the country has enabled them to dig in concealed batteries everywhere which are almost hopeless to detect. I have some seaplanes at my disposal, but in this scrub-covered country they have so far been unable to do much good.

I have not yet seen Nicholas's brother in the Tasmanians, as I had to leave the whole of my mounted troops behind in Egypt, but I am now so badly in want of men that I am getting them all up as foot soldiers temporarily, until we get to more open country where their horses may be of use.

Remember me please to all old friends in the regiment

Yours ever,

Birdie

PS: A most dangerous place this – shrapnel and bullets tumbling in all day every day. I can only get my boats with troops, stores, etc ashore by running the gauntlet. I find that the trenches are almost the only safe place!!

THE REPORT

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND ARMY CORPS

Headquarters
Anzac Cove
11th May 1915

You will, I know, like to hear of the first doings of my Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in the field. We effected a landing as you know on the morning of the 25th. The day before, we transferred 500 men each to the battleships "Queen", "Prince of Wales" and "London", where all were given a good square meal before midnight. When we got about four miles from the land, these men were transferred to the ships boats. You will, I know, be glad to hear how extraordinarily enthusiastic the Naval Officers were at their behaviour on board. It took under ten minutes to

transfer the whole of these men to their boats, and when this had been completed, the Flag Captain said to me "your men are not quiet, they are absolutely silent". These 1,500 men then pushed off in tows of picket boats to the shore, and as they disappeared in the distance without a sound of any sort, I had every hope that we had succeeded in effecting the surprise we wanted. These hopes were, however, shortly dispelled as before the troops touched the beach a heavy fusillade broke out against them. Some of the boats, I am sorry to say, suffered severely in this, but nothing daunted our men for a second, and they just dashed ashore and, once there, raced for the hills as fast as they could. I think I told you there had been some intention at first to have done our landing by day after the Navy had thoroughly bombarded the place. I was, however, averse to this, as I felt that the bombardment would do more harm than good, in that it would advertise our intention of landing, while I felt sure that our great chance was surprise – partial if not complete. I also made up my mind that after landing it would be essential for us to hurl ourselves at the position we had to take without a moments hesitation, and on as broad a front as possible. The results I think fully justified this, as, had we attempted landing in full daylight with any hesitation or delay, I think it is more than doubtful if we should ever have been able to get a footing.

It would have done your heart good to see the way the men went. Nothing would stop them, and I cannot say how deeply I regret their necessary losses. Normally, regiments would of course regularly form up before an attack, but in the present instance this was impossible, as with all the bombardment that was going on at the transports and beach, it was not possible to land in exactly the order planned, and, consequently, when a tow reached the land, the officers commanding had to take the men off to where they were most required. This naturally resulted in the splitting up of regiments very much, and small sections of different regiments found themselves together chasing the Turks off the hills. In their zeal, some went too far to the flanks while the enemy still held the centre of this large hill in strength, and I fear that some of these detachments were cut off and unable to rejoin, though we have not yet been able to get all details. We might say that the men really started fighting at about 3.30 am and were continually at it until dark and even during the whole night – in fact they really had no respite for over 36 hours. On the evening of the day of landing they were, however, naturally exhausted, as they had to get over some very severe hill climbing, carrying heavy weights all the time they were fighting. With exhaustion came the consequent reaction, and when I went round all their trenches (or rather the places where their trenches should have been, had there been time for digging) I found a good many men very much done up. Several small detachments of 20 men or so, when I spoke to them, told me they were the only remaining survivors of their Battalion, the whole of the rest having been cut up! Of course as I was always able to cheer them up by telling them they only had to go round the corner to find at least another 500 on duty there. It took us, however, two or three days to try and collect together these scattered groups, and even now all are not accounted for. Could you see the position we are now occupying, you would realise what the work has been. The hillside everywhere is honeycombed with most cleverly made trenches and are thoroughly concealed, while the "going" is extraordinarily difficult, and in many places the country is quite precipitous. However, as I say, nothing stopped the men, and whatever further actions we may have to fight, this must always stand out to their great credit.

The 1,500 men who were landed off the battleships were immediately followed by the remainder of my covering force, viz 2,500 men on six destroyers, who were ashore very shortly after the advance party. They in turn were followed by two more Infantry Brigades in tows from the transports, and my two batteries of Indian Mountain Artillery. I got the whole of this lot off, viz 12,000 Infantry and two Batteries, by about midday, which I think was not a bad performance. Just as we were starting to land the field Artillery, the enemy's heavy guns from the Dardanelles started upon us, and as they were falling so close to the transports, these had to weigh anchor and stand out to sea again which of course meant delay, and I consequently got very little Artillery ashore that day. Having got them ashore, however, it was very difficult to use them, as the ground everywhere is so precipitous. Houitzors would have been of the greatest value, but, unfortunately, I possess only one four gun battery of these in my army corps, and these have been of inestimable value in keeping down the enemy's guns. By manhandling we have succeeded in getting our field guns up on to the top of hills which seemed at first absolutely inaccessible, and they have done a certain amount of good, but not nearly what houitzors would have done. Practically all this time ie from the

time we were at anchorage up till now, we have been subjected to heavy shelling, and can only exist at all on the small beach which we occupy by shelters dug in everywhere, and even then I am sorry to say many casualties occur daily.

On the day of landing my casualties were 500 killed, 2,500 wounded and 2,000 missing. I much hope that I may find a good many of the missing will eventually be accounted for among these wounded, of whom it was impossible to keep an accurate tally at the time, as we had to evacuate them from the beach at any point as boats became available.

That we have enormous difficulties still before us there can I think be no doubt, and I think it will take us a long time to fight our way through as we mean to do. The Khalid Bahr Plateau in front of us is a regular Gibraltar which we shall have to tackle, unless we can sufficiently dispirit the Turks before then, so as to make them leave it.

Ever since landing on the 25th we have not had a moments respite from fighting. Day and night we have been attacked, and yesterday 250 shrapnel burst over one corner of this camp in ten minutes. All have, however, I hope now fully realised the necessity of digging, by which alone they can hope to escape heavy casualties, and it is rather nice to see what old soldiers a great many of the men have become during the week, and how little respect they now show to the enemy's shrapnel. The waste of ammunition at first was terrible, as was perhaps very natural with an army of young soldiers. The whole of the hill on which we are living is covered with dense scrub about four feet high, and it is certainly rather trying to men's nerves to have the enemy all round them hidden in this stuff, and never knowing when, and in what strength, an attack may be made. By constantly going round the trenches and talking to them all, I hope we have now been able to induce them to hold their fire until an attack actually approaches them, and then to pour in rapid fire and use the bayonet. Whenever this has been done, the Turks have been completely routed, and I think we have accounted for a great number of them.

At first start I had two Turkish divisions against me, which has since been increased to three, while my own numbers have been much reduced, not only by casualties, but I have had to lend two brigades and five batteries to Sir Ian's force at Cape Helles which leaves me with only 10,000 rifles against about 20,000 Turks around me. However, I hope to get my own brigades back shortly, and in the meantime am doing what I can by bluff and small attacks to appear to be much stronger than I am, but you will see it is a bit of a risky game, which after all is only right, as Sir Ian wants me to contain as many of the enemy as we possibly can, while he endeavours to take a rather important position further south with the whole of the rest of his force.

With reference to the last paragraph

For Sir 'Ian' read General Bradley and for 'Birdie' read

General Montgomery, and operation Goodwood east of CAEN June 1944